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Österreichische Zeitschrift für Südostasienwissenschaften
Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies

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FOCUS **NEW MEDIA**

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FOCUS NEW MEDIA

ASEAS 9(2) features a focus on new media and the online-offline nexus as the site of emerging practices and identities in the interlocking fabrics of power and institutionalized relations. It thereby sheds light on the rather unorthodox ways in which digital technologies have become part of the daily dynamics of social, cultural, and political life. Contributions to this special issue range from analyses of the militarization of cyberspace through mass surveillance and surveillance by the masses, the emergence of fascist vigilante groups that operate across different social media platforms, the use of digital media as acts of political participation and digital citizenship, to the intersection of online and offline space in the expression of non-religious identities, and prevailing digital divides. The articles employ a range of analytic frames and cover a variety of aspects of digital Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, Indonesia, and Myanmar. They highlight the complex ways in which different actors set the parameters for participation and expression in digital space in authoritarian and post-authoritarian settings. By challenging notions of technological determinism and placing emphasis on local environments, they contribute to the broader project of provincializing digital media.

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Rezensionen ~ Book Reviews

New Media in Southeast Asia: Concepts and Research Implications

Dayana Lengauer

▸ Lengauer, D. (2016). New media in Southeast Asia: Concepts and research implications. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 9*(2), 187-194.

"New media technologies [have] altered the infrastructures and rhythms of everyday life" (Horst, 2012, p. 62) – this is true not only for technology-driven metropolitan areas in Eeast Asia or the USA, but also, and particularly, for those Southeast Asian countries that hold some of the largest numbers of social media users in the world. Yet, contrary to popular expectations of an interconnected global network society (Castells, 1996), a number of ethnographic studies have exposed the rather unorthodox ways in which digital technologies have become part of the daily dynamics of social, cultural, and political life that depend largely on particular regional settings, infrastructures, offline relationships, and other aspects of locality (Hine, 2000, p. 27; Horst, 2013, pp. 149-151; Horst & Miller, 2006; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Miller, 2011; Miller & Slater, 2000; Postill, 2011; Servaes, 2014; Slater, 2013). Focusing on *New Media in Southeast Asia*, this issue contributes to this project of "provincializing" (Coleman, 2010, p. 489) digital media, particularly social media, by following the ways in which people go about organizing their social, cultural, and political lives in largely institutionalized and conflict-laden environments.

Directing their focus toward the political participation of urban middle classes in authoritarian and post-authoritarian regimes, the authors of this special issue explore the ways in which different actors set the parameters for participation in digital space, and seize digital media for their socio-political and cultural agendas. This approach allows them to avoid media-centric generalizations and various forms of technological determinism associated with the early work of media theorist Marshall McLuhan and others (Baym, 2015, pp. 27-44). Without disregarding the importance of external forces, such as political centralization, bureaucratization, and urbanization, as well as their regional particularities, contributions place a strong emphasis on the agency of Internet users. Hence, digital media feed into, reflect, and shape "symbolic struggles over the perception of the social world" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 20) by allowing for new types of exchange and socialities to emerge "across the gap between the virtual and the actual" (Boellstorff, 2012, p. 52).

While contributions to this issue deploy the terms digital and social media by addressing concrete, non-analog technologies and applications, such as the Internet or Facebook, the term *new media* is rarely discussed in detail. Inquiring what makes new media *new*, Ilana Gershon (2010, p. 10) goes well beyond the factual innovations introduced by what we know today as Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2007; see also Ellison & boyd, 2013). Rather than the technologies themselves,

she argues, it is people's perceptions of and experiences with social media (e.g., Facebook or Instagram) that define them as new. Internet users, as Hine (2000) poses in her book *Virtual Ethnography*, are involved in the construction of digital technology both "through the practices by which they understand it and through the content they produce" (p. 38). Once embedded in everyday practices, new media and their accompanying infrastructures may appear mundane and transparent to users. Yet, emerging forms of social interaction through and with digital media do not go without a fair amount of anxieties related to these media (Baym, 2015, p. 22; Gershon, 2010, pp. 80-81), as they potentially challenge previously established technologies and patterns of exchange (Campbell, 2010, p. 9).

Madianou and Miller (2011) encountered similar suspicion among Filipino domestic workers in London who today could be defined as "the real vanguard troops in marching towards the digital future" (Miller & Horst, 2012, p. 10). Formulating their concept of *polymedia*, the authors explore the ways in which diverse media contribute to the emotional repertoire of Filipino mothers in their communication with their children back in the Philippines. Challenging prevailing ideas that technology determines and transforms social interaction, studies like this indicate that the choice of the medium rarely depends on its technological features alone (Broadbent, 2012). On the contrary, media become mediated by relationships just as much as relationships are mediated by media (Madianou & Miller, 2011, p. 148). This assumption goes not only for interpersonal relationships but also for relations between the state and its citizens (Horst, 2013).

Although digital technologies are still out of reach in some areas in the world today (Coleman, 2010), polymedia seems to be the predominant condition of communication in most parts of Southeast Asia. This condition runs along the availability of several channels of communication, including social networking sites, blogs, email newsletters, voice calls, and so forth. Despite startling technological developments, particularly in the *technopolitan*[1] state of Singapore or in the capital cities of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, digital divides related to Internet connection and costly infrastructure continue to exist (see Einzenberger, this issue) and often point toward the "more fine-grained issues of social and economic status and access" (Tacchi, 2012, p. 227). Development models that often hinge on the arguably interactive, participatory, and democratic perspectives that Web 2.0 technologies open (Castells, 2009), overlook the more "informal ways in which consumers and providers of services and platforms come to subvert, resist, and reconfigure mobile media infrastructures" (Horst, 2013, p. 151). As a number of scholars have argued, the availability of new media does not prescribe the development of a participatory culture (Lim, 2013; Tacchi, 2012). Moreover, as we can draw from a number of cases in Indonesia today,[2] social

1 Technopolitan comes from the term *technopolis*, coined by science journalist Nigel Calder (1969) to describe "a society not only shaped but continuously modified in drastic ways by scientific and technical novelty" (p. 22). Later it became a theoretical paradigm for regional technology-based development (see Smilor, Kozmetsky, & Gibson, 1988).

2 Media coverage on the recent rally that took place on 4 November in the streets of Jakarta and targeted Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known as Ahok, for alleged blasphemy reflected on the low mobilization capacity of particular segments of society. As Muhammad Fajar (2016) observed, those who opposed the protest "often intelligibly discuss complicated democracy-related concepts on social media but fail to back these up with a vigorous movement on the ground". Both massive online and offline mo-

media activism does not always yield the support of the masses or translate into a vast offline movement (see also Schäfer, this issue). Since digital media cultures evolve within the complex fabrics of society and more encompassing systems of power relations, these scholars invite for a more "careful analysis of political processes and their digital dimensions" (Postill, 2012, p. 178). This process-oriented approach goes beyond dualistic conceptualizations of online (virtual) and offline (physical) space as two distinct and sovereign arenas of action (Lim, 2015) and direct attention toward those gaps between the virtual and the actual in which emerging socialities and new forms of social interaction take form (Boellstorff, 2012, p. 52).

The notion of sociality lies at the bottom of much social media scholarship (Pink et al., 2016). Yet, as Baym (2015) and others argue, being 'social' is not the main qualifier of social media that makes them different from earlier forms of mediated communications, including Internet forums or online chatrooms: "What makes 'social media' significant as a category in not the technology, but, rather, the socio-technical dynamics that unfolded as millions of people embrace the technology and used it to collaborate, share information, and socialize" (Ellison & boyd, 2013). In Indonesia, for example, social networking sites like Facebook "allow people to return to certain kinds of intense and interwoven forms of social relationship that they otherwise feared were being lost" (Miller, 2012, p. 148). This is also evident in a number of migration and diaspora studies focusing on social media practices among members of migrant communities (Madianou & Miller, 2011; McKay, 2011; Panagakos & Horst, 2006).

The social impacts of the Internet and social media are best understood as the "result of the organic interaction between technology and social, political, and cultural structures and relationships" (Lim, 2013, p. 637). This interaction is the focal point of the contributions to this issue. In their papers, Pinkaew Laungaramsri and Wolfram Schaffar respectively build on earlier observations that "social media tools can simultaneously support grass-roots political mobilizations as well as government surveillance and human rights violations" (Coleman, 2010, p. 493). Both follow Evgeny Morozov's (2011) critique on the idea that new media inevitably advance democracy and freedom and show how digital technologies have been used by the Thai state and military to identify 'traitors' of the regime and suppress political dissent. In the light of 'cyber dystopia' created in the aftermaths of the 2014 coup d'état, Pinkaew analyzes the interplay between state institutions, social media, and popular uses arguing that the ongoing militarization of cyberspace has been accomplished through the combination of mass surveillance and "surveillance by the masses". She casts a closer look at the state-initiated programs Cyber Scouts and Cyber Witch Hunts as the forerunners of an emergent right-wing movement carried by individuals and ultra-royalist groups and working as a counter-movement against perceived anti-monarchy networks. Much in line with Pinkaew's analysis, Wolfram Schaffar demonstrates how in the context of Thailand's military regime, Facebook has become the 'battleground' of competing political camps. In his investigation of the online formation and opera-

bilization against Ahok, and its missing offline elements among those who opposed the rally, prove Lim's (2013) observations that social media activism is only prone to translate in offline mobilization when "its narratives are simple, associated with low risk actions and congruent with dominant meta-narratives, such as nationalism and religiosity" (p. 636).

tion of 'fascist vigilante groups' on the Internet, he shows how features of new media technologies that might be considered supportive with regard to political mobilization can become 'dangerous' in the hands of right-wing groups.

Communication technologies are not automatically political, but the use of digital media can doubtlessly become politically meaningful (Coleman, 2010; Postill, 2012). Analyzing the political expressions and social media rhetoric of Thai women during the 2013/2014 Bangkok political protests, Olivia Guntarik and Verity Trott demonstrate the ways in which the rise of digital media use has altered the trajectories of political experience and the configurations of political participation. The authors argue that in the context of Thailand's conflict-laden political environment, social and digital media enable Thai women to 'speak out' in ways they would not have been able to without the Internet.

The plurality of voices, reinforced by Web 2.0 participatory architectures, has been central in narratives concerning processes of democratization (Couldry, 2010; Shirky, 2011). Yet, as Saskia Schäfer shows in her contribution to this issue, the 'act' to present oneself and the 'right' to express an opinion are informed not only by local structures but also by transnational agendas and their popular rhetoric. In her inquiry into social media practices of Indonesian atheist activists, Schäfer illustrates how activists' commitment to a non-religious identity and to the right to freedom of non-religious expression, reinforces exclusive understandings of difference and braces existing cultural and social divides. The increased visibility of non-belief facilitated through the offensive use of social media by non-religious actors and the attention of international media and donor agencies given to their activism – in a state defined by the belief in God as well as local narratives of religious harmony – has increased public suspicion and enhanced processes of 'sectarianization'.

In their discussion of social media, all four contributions point at the significance of online communication platforms when offline forms of activism and other forms of social and political participation are restricted or otherwise remain limited. Yet, their analyses do not hold still at the enabling forces and architectures of digital technologies that accompany activists and other groups of people in perilous political environments. Rather, they inquire into the wider effects and implications these technologies and their appropriation bring along for different actors and their 'revolutionary', and at times sweeping, projects.

Since digital media have become intrinsic to both the institutions that structure and the practices that organize social and political life, the rise of online activism is indicative for on-going transformations within political landscapes and state-citizen relationships. In his study of digital acts of 'witnessing' and 'flaming' against the 'political dynasty' of Banten – a province on the island of Java in Indonesia – Muhammad Zamzam Fauzanafi points at emergent practices of digital citizenship that are not easily framed in traditional understandings of state-citizen relations. Much in line with Guntarik and Trott, he pleads for a reconsideration of what it means to be politically engaged in a digital age, adhering to changing forms of citizenship that develop along autonomous forms of expression and loose networks of social interaction and are accompanied by a broader mistrust toward politicians. While inquiring into alternative spaces of political participation and civic engagement, contributions to this issue indicate the strident rise of hate speech in social media as they become sites for

the open expression of discontent and what Fauzanafi frames as civic disgust. Notwithstanding this trend in Southeast Asian political contexts, Sirima Thongsawang sketches increasing horizontal processes of communication and multiple possibilities of information exchange in her study among Thai immigrants living in Berlin and their respective local organizations.

In an interview with Phyu Phyu Thi and Htaike Htaike Aung, co-founders of *Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation* (MIDO), Rainer Einzenberger discusses popular interpretations of the Internet and the local use of social media. As the interviewees explain, in Myanmar digital technologies and new media only recently hit the market, and Facebook is largely perceived as a legitimate news channel. While the Internet is the "central conduit and node" (Coleman, 2010, p. 495) for the work of both freelance journalists and news agencies, the difference between quality news and light package information (Lim, 2013) may not be clear under particular circumstances.

A short contribution reports on a workshop that focused on social media and Islamic practice in Southeast Asia and took place in Vienna early this year. The workshop was organized by researchers from the Institute for Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences and invited presenters from four continents to reflect on the particular case of Indonesia.

Outside the focus on new media, this issue features an article by Joseph A. L. Reyes in the field of demography and population studies that explores relations of leisure time activities with sociodemographic indicators of subjective happiness and health in the Philippines. Here, the Internet is mentioned only marginally as a leisure activity that is deemed rather costly and involving high personal expense.

Seeking scholarly discussion of how various offline contexts affect the production and reach of new media, contributions to this issue cover a variety of analytic frames and aspects of digital Southeast Asia, with topics ranging from Internet vigilantism to ideologies of cultural difference. Focusing predominantly on Thailand and Indonesia, they reveal the remarkable depth and earnest implications of digital media in everyday and institutional life and give arresting insights into those dimensions of state-citizen relations that often remain veiled.

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Mass Surveillance and the Militarization of Cyberspace in Post-Coup Thailand[1]

Pinkaew Laungaramsri

▸ Pinkaew Laungaramsri. (2016). Mass surveillance and the militarization of cyberspace in post-coup Thailand. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *9*(2), 195-214.

Post-coup Thailand has witnessed a troubling shift toward censorship, surveillance, and suppression in cyberspace. With cyber security ranking prominently on the military's agenda and the expansion of the military's cyber intervention, the country's online infrastructure has undergone politicization, securitization, and militarization. This paper argues that the militarization of cyberspace in Thailand represents the process in which cyber warfare capabilities have been integrated with other military forces and with support from the masses. This process has been effective through at least three significant mechanisms, including mass surveillance, surveillance by the masses, and normalization of surveillance. Social media have been turned into an absolute digital panopticon. Cyber dystopia, created by the 2014 coup and supported by the masses, has served to sustain a 'state of exception' not only within the territorial borders of the state, but also more importantly, within the virtual space of civil society. Cyber surveillance by the military and the masses has continued to jeopardize the already vulnerable Thai democracy.

Keywords: Cyber Dystopia; Cyber Witch Hunt; Mass Surveillance; Militarization of Cyberspace; Thailand

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INTRODUCTION

On 3 May 2016, a group of activists including myself was summoned to a military barrack in Chiang Mai city for an 'attitude adjustment'[2]. The rationale for the summoning, as the commander of the 33rd Military Circle, the third general, Major General Kosol Prathumchat explained, was that my colleagues and I violated the *National Council for Peace and Order* (NCPO) orders, concretely order number 3/2015 which installed "measures to deal with actions intended to

1 The content of this paper was presented at several conferences and workshops including the Forum on Human Rights and Everyday Governance in Thailand: Past, Present, and Future at Harvard University on 6 March 2015; New Media, Cyber Activism and Social Movement in Asia at Harvard University on 1 April 2015; and Thailand Update Conference at Columbia University on 1 May 2015.

2 'Attitude adjustment' is a technique employed by Thailand's military government to subdue its critics and opponents. Those who are summoned for attitude adjustment might be interrogated for several hours or detained without charge and interrogated in the military facilities. The detention period ranges from one to seven days during which the contact to the outside world is prohibited. At the end of the detention session, the detained will be asked to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU), a formal agreement between the detained person and the military government, stating that the former will no longer be involved in any political activities and will not leave the country without an official permission by the government.

undermine or destroy peace and national security", by staging a protest at the Thapae Gate of Chiang Mai city on 27 April 2016. In response to this accusation, I argued that the gathering was peaceful and did not involve any activities that would be considered as a threat to national security. I also maintained that the assembly of our small group took place in a public arena where similar activities frequently occurred. However, another high ranking military official who was also there, objected. As he contended, our presence at Thapae Gate might not have posed a problem, but when I posted a photo of the group standing there on Facebook with the caption "Freedom, Freedom, Freedom Now!" – that was definitely a political act that violated the law.

The aim of this paper is to examine the interrelation of the state and social media and their contribution to the creation of *cyber dystopia*[3] in post-coup Thailand. Although social media and computer-mediated communication have been subject to control by the Thai state for almost a decade, cyber security has only recently been identified by the army as a significant part of national security. While the militarization of cyberspace has been incorporated into a part of the army's strategies, various tactics of online and offline surveillance have been deployed to monitor both the data and traffic of Thai citizens on the Internet. In the post-coup era where offline activism has been severely suppressed, the Internet has become a primary platform for communication and digital surveillance by the military which has not only served to monitor online activities and intercept electronic communication, but also provided an effective means to arrest dissidents and anti-military activists. Cyber-crime has recently been identified by the Thai army as one of the most significant non-traditional security threats that requires strict mechanism of control. In defending the necessity of the National Cyber Security Bill, Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha firmly asserted: "If there is a threat to national security – a violation, or someone committing a crime – we need to empower state officials to investigate" (Sim, 2015).

The Thai military's shift toward cyber security is a response to the need to find a new role for the Thai armed forces in the 21st century. While, on the one hand, the military continues to increase its surveillance capability across wider social arenas, on the other hand, cyberspace has been discovered to represent a new platform for political empowerment. Militarization of cyberspace is thus the new mechanism for the military to consolidate its political power. As Pirongrong Rananand (2003) argued, the changing political landscape in Thailand has had a profound impact on the Internet regulatory landscape.

The military's attempt to systematically control the Internet began in 2007, following the 2006 coup, when the military-led Surayud government passed the Com-

3 Dystopia brought by digital technology has been discussed by several scholars such as David Nye (2007), Nancy Baym (2010), and Evgeny Morozov (2011; 2013) in the attempt to counter the idea of cyber-utopianism – the belief that online communication provides freedom and emancipation. According to these scholars, the use of digital technology can also result in the individual's inability to control the changes and impacts brought by this new means of communication. Nye (2007) and Morozov (2011) further posit that the development of the Internet has also led to an increased control of society by the elite and demonstrates how such technology represents a false hope of freedom. Baym (2010), on the other hand, suggests that new media have produced fear among those people who increasingly considered that cyberspace will take away the intimacy of social relationships. Following these scholars, this paper uses the term cyber dystopia to refer to the state in which a fearful and oppressive atmosphere has been generated by digital technology used by the state as its apparatus to control its citizens.

puter Crime Act.[4] Although Internet filtering was first initiated in 2002 by the *Ministry of Information and Communication Technology* (MICT), the 2007 Computer Crime Act was the first step to state legalization of information control on the Internet.[5] This law has created substantial penalties for cyber-crimes and placed criminal liability on any person who allowed unlawful content to be distributed, including lèse-majesté (O'Brien, 2014). Since it came into force, the law has been widely criticized for its violation of freedom of expression on the Internet.

In the aftermath of the 2014 coup, cyberspace in Thailand was brought under tremendous political pressure. As social media were the only remaining arena used by the Thai dissidents to wage protest and engage in online activism against the coup d'état, it also became the most effective sphere that the military government could employ to create their political legitimacy, instigate cyber libels against the opposition, and manipulate civil sentiment. In a country with numerous coups d'état, the recent coup has combined online and offline tactics of suppression, including mass-supported surveillance, in an attempt to secure its authoritarian regime (Sinpeng, 2014).

Apart from implementing several forms of Internet regulations, the junta also created new administrative bodies aiming at more effective monitoring and control of online communication. Crimes related to lèse-majesté, national security, or 'infringing' NCPO's orders would be tried and adjudicated by the military court, which lack appellate and higher courts. Activists and political opponents were targeted and arrested based on their social media activities while academics and journalists were summoned for questionings. The military government is also reportedly laying the political groundwork for a dramatic restructuring of the country's Internet landscape through the *Single Gateway* or the *Great Firewall of Thailand* project – a project to consolidate all gateways into one central government-controlled point to allow for easier monitoring and interception of materials deemed inappropriate.[6] If implemented, the proposed single gateway will not only dramatically cripple the country's digital infrastructure, but might also lead to the instability of Internet connections that can result in an immense economic damage ("Government Warns", 2015).

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4 The Computer Crime Act was first drafted in 2002 during the Thaksin government. It was, however, revised several times, in 2003, 2005, and 2006, before being enacted in 2006 during the military-appointed Surayud government. According to Sawatree Suksri, in the last revision under the supervision of the military-appointed National Assembly, fundamental clauses were removed from the act, especially those related to the protection of human rights. Serious penalty was also suspended on those Internet providers who distributed illegal contents. At the same time what was considered illegal content was very broadly defined and subsequently resulted in random arrests and charges by government authorities. The Computer Crime Act, especially the 2006 revised version, has been heavily criticized as being a tool to control and suppress people who share different political views from those of the government (Sawatree, 2011).

5 Since the implementation of the act, court orders to block Internet content have increased from two URLs in 2007 to over 74,000 in 2012 (Freedom House, 2014).

6 Section 1.2 of the Cabinet Resolution of 30 June 2015 indicates that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology must proceed with the "implementation of a single gateway to be used as a device to control inappropriate websites and flow of news and information from overseas through the Internet system" ("Govt 'Gateway'", 2015). The proposed project has prompted widespread outcry among netizens who set up a campaign "Go Against Thai Govt to Use a Single Internet Gateway" on change.org. In December 2015, the campaign, which was launched in October 2015, had already earned 152,886 signatures.

Literature on social media has often emphasized the rise of new media and online social networks as one of the major forces that have contributed to novel practices of popular democracy in the last three decades (Anduiza, Perea, Jensen, & Jorba, 2012; Castells, 2007; Clark, 2012; Van De Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004). Formerly, traditional political movements gave priority to street protests and direct contestation to power holders. The development of communication technologies, however, has altered the nature and dynamics of social movements by stimulating the diffusion of protest ideas and strategies beyond the limit of physical boundaries and modern nation-states. Such changes have also transformed state-citizen relationships and surveillance practices in the political arena. While a growing body of literature recognizes the rise of 'new' social movements and its impacts on the transformation of the political landscape, little attention has been paid to the manifestation of complex political actions interfacing with different ideologically-based social and political movements, particularly with the formation of counter-movements in the public sphere, and their relation to new media.

The linkage between social media and democracy has been widely acknowledged (Trippi, 2004). Yet, while it is often believed that the advancement of the Internet has contributed to the building of a digital civic infrastructure where new ways to access data and network have increased the distribution of information and the political potential as well as the "electronic fabric of struggle" (Cleaver, 1995)[7] within civil society, it is less recognized that the digital has also significantly reshaped the "art of government" (Foucault, 2010).[8] Among the very few studies on the politics of social media, the work of Morozov (2011) offers a critical scholarly perspective on questions of "cyber-utopianism" or the Internet's "freedom agenda" by directing our attention toward the "dark side" of the Internet. According to Morozov (2011, 2013), the new media not only empower visions of democracy and freedom, but also enable the consolidation of authoritarian regimes as they become used by the state to engage in mass surveillance, political repression, and the spreading of nationalist and extremist propaganda. Morozov argues that there are two delusions propagated by scholars and activists of new media and social movements: The first is "cyber-utopianism" (Morozov, 2011, pp. xiii-xiv), or the belief that Internet culture is inherently emancipatory; and the second is "Internet-centrism" (Morozov, 2011, pp. xv-xvii), or the propensity to view all political and social change through the lens of the Internet. By using a number of cases worldwide to illustrate how the Internet did not eventually deliver the democratizing effects it promised, Morozov points to the dramatic repercussions of the Internet's political role: the appropriation of the online sphere by the authoritarian regime to crack down online activism; the employment of social networks to infiltrate protest groups; or the online seeding of state propaganda in order to more

7 The term was coined by Cleaver (1995) to refer to the use of electronic media in the Zapatista revolution which expanded to computer-mediated communication channels.

8 In the case of Thailand, the rise of social media has stimulated a new form of computer-mediated communication and a rapid flow of information and ideas from various sources – nationally, regionally, and globally. Yet, as Soraj Hongladarom (2000) recently pointed out, online communication in Thailand has been mediated predominantly by 'Thai' culture: Strict prohibition of popular websites and discussion forums, such as Pantip.com, and self-censorship on certain topics, such as those related to the Thai monarchy, are a common moral practice among Thai cyber citizens.

effectively control the movement of the opposition. Contrary to the ideal of political emancipation, Morozov contends that the Internet can in fact contribute to the tightening and suppression of freedom.

Gunitsky (2015) takes the argument of social media effects even further. In authoritarian regimes, he argues, many states have significantly shifted their strategy of social media suppression toward cooptation as another potential mechanism of regime resilience – this is the latest development of authoritarian state-social media relation. Non-democratic regimes are increasingly moving toward pro-actively subverting social media for their own purposes. The objectives are to undermine the opposition, to influence the contour of public discussion, and to gather information regarding "falsified public preferences" (Gunitsky, 2015, p. 42). Tactics such as *counter-mobilization* of supporters and *discourse-framing* of the larger national discourse are used in order to maintain the legitimacy of the regime through social media. Furthermore, regimes can utilize digital technologies to mobilize their own domestic allies, including regular citizens motivated by patriotism, ideology, or other interests (Gunitsky, 2015, p. 45). The antipode of Internet freedom is thus not only Internet censorship but also a combination of control, cooptation, and manipulation. While dimensions of control and suppression have long been acknowledged in scholarly work on the Internet, the aspect of non-democratic regime surveillance has been largely disregarded (Greitens, 2013).

Following a critical view toward social media and the authoritarianism nexus, this paper investigates the role of the Internet in the military regime in post-coup Thailand. Although new media have prompted the growth of online pro-democracy activism among Thai civic groups over the past decades, they have also been increasingly employed to mobilize and establish an absolute royalist ideology. Apart from the military regime's strategies to censor and suppress oppositional political views, social media have also become the arena for a significant counter-movement; this is the right-wing initiative, mobilized to instigate nationalist sentiment and pro-military ideology. Since the 2014 coup d'état, when social movements in Thailand increasingly moved online, the militarization of cyberspace has become an "apparatus of security" where the liberal civic sphere of social media is appropriated and turned into a domain of "governmentality" (Foucault, 2010). Increased control and surveillance by the state have further transformed the Thai political landscape into a 'predator-prey' battleground, while widespread opposition and protest has in turn heightened the military's sense of insecurity and thus surveillance efforts. It is worth noting that over the past five years the nature of the military surveillance system has shifted and intensified in several ways (Sinpeng, 2014). First, cyberspace has become the military's priority battlefield. Second, Internet surveillance has been attached to the military's security agenda and institutionalized within the new military state. Third, the surveillance agenda has been integrated into a variety of administrative institutions, such as in the newly established Army Cyber Center, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, the Police Department, and the Ministry of Justice. And fourth, the military's support of popular denunciation has become part of a campaign that serves to perpetuate and expand surveillance in order to eliminate ideological enemies. All of these efforts aim to uncover the so-called network of the anti-monarchy and conspiracies against the regime.This paper argues that the mili-

tarization of cyberspace in Thailand represents the process in which cyber warfare capabilities have been expanded through other military forces and with the notable support from the urban middle-class masses. This process has been effective due to at least three significant mechanisms including mass surveillance, surveillance by the masses, and the normalization of surveillance. While in many countries, cyber militarization has primarily been an outward move toward external security threats, Internet militarization in Thailand, however, has been designed as a specific weapon that turns against internal threats and thus its own people. The 2014 coup and the post-coup government have turned social media into an absolute digital panopticon aimed to thwart protest, to wreck potential networks of dissents, and to infuse public fear. Some scholars call this phenomenon the "cyber coup" (Sinpeng, 2014), while others dub it "the martial law of the online" (Arthit, 2015). I argue that the cyber dystopia created by the 2014 coup and supported by urban middle-class masses has served to sustain a state of exception – the suspension of the rule of law in the name of the public good (Agamben, 2005) not only within the territorial boundaries of the nation, but also within the virtual space of civil society. The collaboration of mass surveillance and surveillance by the masses not only works to jeopardize Thai democracy but also to stifle the culture of individual freedom within Thai society.

MASS SURVEILLANCE

Mass surveillance and secret warrants are not new in Thailand. During the Cold War period, Thailand was the region's largest information-gathering base for the United States and served as the center of intelligence gatherings from different countries over the world (Kavi, 2013). Anti-communist operations were carried out both by the police and the army. Such operations included censorship, spying, purges, and imprisonment of those who were suspected as communist and communist sympathizers. In the post-Cold War era, mass surveillance against communism subsided. The Anti-Communist Act was repealed in 2001 and many intelligence agencies such as the *Internal Security Operation Command* (ISOC) found themselves without mission. Under the Prayuth regime, the expansion of mass surveillance and the emphasis on cyber surveillance has put in place a new form of digital panopticon that differs both in scope and scale from that of the Cold War mission.

From the first day of the declaration of martial law, the military has initiated cyber warfare by systematically controlling the mass and social media.[9] Many junta orders were issued to forbid traditional broadcasts from distorting news reports, to censor online news, and to arrest hundreds of critics (Freedom House, 2015). At the same time, several technologies have been used to block and censor the Internet, such as caching, blacklisting domain names or IP addresses, or redirecting to a government

9 Although cyber warfare is often defined as actions by a nation-state to penetrate another nation's computer-based information system and networks in order to disable or disrupt essential services (Clarke, 2010), the Royal Thai Army uses the term to refer to military operations to eliminate cyber-crimes that posed serious threat to the internal security of the nation. As Major General Kongcheep Tantrawanich, spokesman for the Ministry of Defense, stated, in the past, each branch of the armed forces worked uncoordinatedly in dealing with cyber-attacks – the establishment of a *Cyber Warfare Unit* will enhance the army's ability to work effectively in order to ensure the cyber security of the country ("Cyber Warfare Unit", 2015).

homepage.[10] These measures are apparently employed in order to make 'unsuitable' websites appear unavailable.

Censorship

On 28 May 2014, Facebook was temporarily blocked for around one and a half hours in the afternoon by the MICT in order to silence the anti-coup protest. According to the *Bangkok Post*, up to 30 million accounts across Thailand were affected by the Facebook outage (Achara, 2014). In response to media criticism, the NCPO denied responsibility for the blocking, claiming that the problem was a gateway glitch. However, international media such as Reuters cited Surachai Srisaracam, permanent secretary of the MICT, in an interview stating:

> We have blocked Facebook temporarily and tomorrow we will call a meeting with other social media, like Twitter and Instagram, to ask for cooperation from them . . . . Right now there's a campaign to ask for people to stage protests against the army so we need to ask for cooperation from social media to help us stop the spread of critical messages about the coup. (Petty, 2014)

According to Freedom House (2014) – a US-based human rights advocacy organization – a spokesman for the Telenor Group, owner of the DTAC mobile network operator, told the Norwegian *Aftenposten* newspaper that the telecommunications regulator *National Telecommunication Commission* (NBTC) had ordered mobile networks to block Facebook on 28 May 2014. However, in the wake of this unauthorized remark, an NBTC official warned DTAC for its "inappropriate comment" and threatened to investigate its foreign shareholder percentage and to ban it from the upcoming 4G spectrum auction. As a result, Telenor issued an apology for actions which "damaged the public image of the NBTC and the NCPO" ("DTAC Punished", 2014).

A report from the Citizen Lab (2014) indicates that since seizing power in May 2014, Thailand's military junta has blocked hundreds of websites deemed a threat to national security. In the semi-annual report of the Royal Police Department, Police General Somyos Pumpanmuang, Commissioner General, claimed that in the latter half of 2014 the Police Department closed down 25,069 websites disseminating lèse-majesté content ("Six Months Report", 2015).[11] Freedom House ranked Thailand's Internet freedom in 2014 and 2015 as "Not Free" – a very low status in comparison to its neighboring countries, such as Myanmar which was ranked "Partly Free" in 2014

10 Blacklisting websites is ideal for this kind of web censorship since webmasters are usually unaware when their websites become blocked (Race, 2004).

11 Unlawful contents are usually classified by the police and relevant authorities into seven broad categories including pornography, sale of sex equipment, threats to national security, which includes criticisms of the monarchy, illegal products and services, copyright infringement, illegal gambling, and others. Statistics by the Royal Police Department show that prior to the 2006 military coup, the top illicit websites reported were mostly relating to pornography ("Illicit Website Reported", n.d.). The shift toward lèse-majesté or threats to national security as the prime target of censorship in the period after the 2006 coup reflects an increasingly turbulent political situation in Thailand where the use of lèse-majesté has become a political tool to suppress dissident views against the military government.

(Freedom House, 2014, 2015).[12] Clearly, in the aftermath of the coup, the numbers of websites that became blocked escalated with reasons shifting toward the violation of the lèse-majesté law.

Lèse-majesté law – a criminal code to protect the dignity of the majesty and members of the royal monarch – has an intriguing history. The law dates back to 1908, when the country was under the absolute rule of the monarchy. Since 1932, when democracy was adopted with the King as head of the state, the protection of the King has continued to be recognized in the constitution and specifically in the Criminal Code under the Article 112. Any defamation, insult, or threat to the King, the Queen, the heir-apparent, or the Regent will be punished with imprisonment of 3 to 13 years. However, as some scholars have observed, in the transition to democracy, the use of lèse-majesté in Thailand has been intensified – a tendency opposite to that of other countries with similar constitutional monarchies (Somchai & Streckfuss, 2008). Between 1990 and 2005, only a few lèse-majesté cases per year were recorded and in some years (1993, 2002), there were no new cases received by the prosecution department at all (Streckfuss, 2011, p. 111). But the statistics have increased 15 times between 2006 and 2011, with more than 400 cases being tried, and in most cases, bails were denied. Since the military coup in May 2014, more than 50 lèse-majesté cases were brought to trial, three out of four of which were related to online message posting or sharing. Under the military courts, even harsher sentences were enforced. In August 2015, a tour operator and a hotel worker were sentenced to 60 and 58 years respectively for an article posted on Facebook. The sentences were reduced to half after a guilty plea ("Thai Courts Give", 2015). The incident marks the longest recorded sentence for lèse-majesté in the Thai history.

The intensification of lèse-majesté law over the past decade demonstrates a certain connection between the enforcement of this law and the political instability of Thailand. Censorship and political cleansing has been carried out extensively by several junta governments in order to thwart their opponents and weaken the democratic civil society. The far-reaching use of lèse-majesté law has turned Thailand into what Streckfuss (2011) calls the "defamation regime" where rules of law and freedom of speech have been suspended. As the definitions of insult and defamation have never been clearly explained, and details of the charges are never publicized under the pretext to avoid repeating the offensive remarks, the allegation of lèse-majesté can be random and arbitrary while the accusation can be made against anyone. A self-perpetuating mechanism of surveillance, the law along with other related legislations such as the Computer Crime Act have become the most draconian tools employed by the junta to stifle the right of the people to freedom of expression, both in the real/physical and virtual realms.

Deception/Interception

Deception was a more advanced tactic used to deceive Facebook users in order to gain access to personal information. According to the Thai Netizen Network, a Bangkok-based digital rights group, the Thai police's *Technology Crime Suppression Divi-*

12 Thailand's status of Internet freedom declined after the year 2013 when it was still rated as "Partly Free" (Freedom House, 2014).

sion (TCSD) created a fake Facebook application which was part of the government program to monitor access to blocked websites ("Thai Police Create", 2014). In this application, users were asked to provide personal details such as their date of birth and email address. When users entered the page, four buttons would appear on the webpage – "Close", "Sign in with Facebook", "Sign in with Google", and "Sign in with Microsoft". If users clicked "Close" or "Sign in with Facebook", they would be directed to a Facebook page which then asked the users to grant permission for an application called "Login" to access the users' email addresses and public profiles. If users clicked "Sign in with Google", they would be redirected to a Google page which also asked the users to allow an application called TCSD to access the same kind of information. Through these fake applications, users were under the impression that they were merely logging into a website via Facebook or Google. But by entering their information, users unintentionally gave permission to the TCSD to access personal data stored on their Facebook pages.

The tactic of deception via fake online applications was twice suspended by Facebook. However, Prachatai noted that hundreds of email addresses had already been harvested ("Thai Police Create", 2014). It is not clear how many suspects were arrested specifically because of their activity on social media, yet iLaw reported that by 21 August 2014 there had been 257 arrests for offensive comments; 30% of these (77 cases) were charged due to comments made on the Internet. Additionally, numerous charges concerning the violation of the lèse-majesté law were carried out through the interception of online activities.

To equip the surveillance bureaucracies with greater capacity, the Thai cabinet also approved eight draft bills which were planned to transform the country's economy into a 'digital' economy.[13] Among these bills was the notorious Cyber Security Bill which was designed to restructure and tighten the control of telecommunications in Thailand. If further approved by the National Legislative Assembly, the bill would create a *Cyber Security Commission* – a new body headed by the prime minister and authorized to access any type of digital information from the country's providers of communication services without a court order. With full authority, the commission could also order all public and private organizations to cooperate against any perceived threat to national cyber security, summon individuals for questions, and grant legal power to any appointed officer to access emails, instant messages, and other forms of text-based communication as well as demand access to information on any computer system and listen to any voice conversations on any network in Thailand (Silfversten, 2015). With this bill, the martial law would be normalized and turned into an actual law that would grant the MICT and the new state apparatus unlimited power and the most alarming means of surveillance in the digital history of Thailand.

13 The eight draft bills are parts of the Digital Development Plan for Economy and Society put forward by the *Committee on Preparations for Digital Economy and Society*, chaired by Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha. The plan covers 20 years of an administrative reform in order to establish the digital foundation of the country and to introduce digital technology in all sectors of the country. Eight items of the legislation were proposed to be amended and approved as part of the plan. These include the (1) Electronic Transaction Bill (amendment); (2) Cybersecurity Bill; (3) Computer-Related Crime Bill (amendment); (4) Personal Data Protection Bill; (5) Digital Economy Promotion Bill; (6) Digital Development for Economy and Society Fund Bill; (7) Broadcasting and Telecommunication Regulator Bill (amendment); and (8) Electronic Transaction Development Agency Bill (amendment) (Zeldin, 2016).

SURVEILLANCE BY THE MASSES: CYBER SCOUTS AND CYBER WITCH HUNTS

The militarization of cyberspace has been effective not only through the technique of mass surveillance, which has been deployed in various administrative organizations, but also, importantly, through the establishment of surveillance by the masses. Military support of this process has been both direct and indirect as surveillance by the masses developed in both organized structures and more impromptu forms and settings. Some organized surveillance networks of netizens have been initiated and supported by the government while others act independently. In the aftermath of the coup, the right-wing movement of the *People's Democratic Reform Committee* (PDRC) has transformed into a para-military network of netizens, assisting the military to wage cyberwar against the opposition. Two significant programs that are actively at work are the *Cyber Scout Program* and *Cyber Witch Hunt* organized by the *Garbage Collecting Organization* (GCO).

Cyber Scouts

The Cyber Scout Program was developed in 2010 by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Information and Communications and Technology during the military-backed Abhisit government. It lapsed for several years and re-emerged again after the 2014 coup. The program is currently under the auspices of the MICT. The objective of this program is to create a network that collaborates to eradicate 'unsuitable' and 'disrespectful' websites and to build a network of volunteers to protect the monarchy in the online sphere. Unlike *Village Scouts*[14] in the 1970s, the patrolling power of Cyber Scouts extends beyond the limits of physical boundaries.[15] Currently, there are 112 schools committed to the program which have signed a memorandum of understanding with the MICT. The MICT also claimed that it has so far 'recruited' more than 120,000 Cyber Scouts nation-wide and plans to double the size in the near future.

Cyber Scouts are needed in order to enhance the state's capacity of surveillance. As Farrelly (2010) noted, the past efforts of the government to police the Internet have enjoyed only partial success. Although the military is able to block a number of websites, many of them re-surface with new IP addresses and new cohorts of Internet users. At the same time, contentious content could be copied and redistributed, made more attractive and disseminated more widely. Notably, the reinvention of Cyber Scouts also represents a significant mechanism to indoctrinate young Internet users with ultra-royalist values. This agenda is timely, especially since university stu-

14 Village Scout was a country-wide organization founded by the Thai Border Patrol Police under the aegis of the Ministry of Interior during the 1970s. Sponsored by the King and the Queen of Thailand, the aim of the organization was to promote national unity and to counter the communist insurgency. Organized in small cells and trained in a five-day training course, Village Scouts acted as the surveillance apparatus of the state and would inform local officials about suspicious incidents such as strangers entering the villages. During the short period of the Village Scout establishment, it was estimated that over five million Thais, or 10% of the population had completed the training program prerequisite to becoming a Village Scout (Muecke, 1980, pp. 407-409).

15 Since today's boy-scout program is under the patronage of the King, it was easy to integrate the agenda of cyber surveillance into existing boy-scout activities.

dent movements have become more active in demanding democracy and freedom of expression. The program thus works as a counter-movement to thwart the potential growth of the student movement by turning school students into secret police.

One Cyber Scout interviewed by AFP was a 39-year old school worker in Bangkok who patrolled the Internet pages on his computer in search of offensive remarks that might constitute lèse-majesté (AFP, 2011). Trained in a one-day Cyber Scout camp, this man told AFP: "My inspiration to be a Cyber Scout is the King. There are many ways to protect the institute, and this is one of them" (AFP, 2011). Like other Cyber Scouts, he would roam around certain websites and social networks in his free time and look for seemingly insulting posts. He claimed that he had not reported anybody to the authorities yet. But he assured AFP that if he found any comments deemed offensive to the King, he would immediately contact the person who posted them. "Not many people know about the project. They may think they are talking to a friend because I don't tell them I'm a Cyber Scout", he said (AFP, 2011).

In the post-coup era, cyber vigilantism and the 12 core values of the Thai schools' motto promoted by the Prayuth regime work hand in hand in transforming schools across the nation into a panopticon unit of virtual surveillance to both protect the royal institution and further nurture the ultra-royalist ideology.

Cyber Witch Hunts

Historically, witch hunting, both literal and metaphorical, has always been characterized as an attempt to impose conformity to the ideology of the dominant class (Federici, 2004). The practice of witch hunting involves an investigation of subversive activities in order to harass and punish those people with differing views. This was equally true for the Cold War era in Thailand when the label 'communist' could put one in jail and thus forced many people to join the insurgent movement in the jungle (Thak, 2007). Fear is used to regulate societal behavior while punishment is enforced on the divergent in order to bring conformity and order into society. In the history of anti-communism in Thailand, rumor was enough to bring somebody to trial, usually resulting in the imprisonment of the accused. In many cases, the alleged communists were hunted down and violently killed as suggested by the phrase, coined by people in the south of Thailand: "*Theeb Long Khao Phao Long Thang Dang*", literally meaning "kicking [them] down the mountain, burning [them] in the red tank" (Pornteap, 2012).[16]

Cyber witch hunting in contemporary Thailand centers around accusations of anti-monarchy ideology disseminated online. This ultra-royalist movement acts in various forms, both individually and collectively. Some journalists estimated that there were more than 20 ultra-royalist groups that work to monitor the Internet in order to wipe out any criticism of the monarchy and hunt down offenders (Thouvenot, 2014). Many of the group leaders are associated with the military, some being former military officers or supporters of the coup. One of the most active groups is the Garbage Collecting Organization. This group is led by the Director of the Mon-

16 It was estimated that more than 3,000 people in Southern Thailand were killed during anti-communist purges and witch hunts in the 1960s and 1970s (Pornteap, 2012).

gkut Wattana General Hospital in Bangkok, Major General Rientong Nan-nah. The GCO Facebook page was set up in 2014 with currently more than 242,680 likes. The goal of the organization is to mobilize people to assist in witch hunting and increase the charge against those identified as 'garbage'[17]. GCO also provides online training for those who wish to become professional in hunting down anti-monarchy Internet users. The recent death of the King has witnessed an escalation in witch hunting by ultra-royalists who individually and collectively harassed or threatened those who were accused of being disrespectful to the deceased monarch. Those who did not demonstrate proper mourning etiquette, such as wearing black clothing, could be targeted for bullying, both physically and in virtual spheres (Teeranai, 2016). Online expressions of indifference toward the passing of the monarch were also dangerous as the person who posted such expressions could be hunted down by an angry mob or encounter a violent reaction by the organized royalist group ("Angry Mob Demands", 2016). Most of the incidents of witch hunts took place in the acknowledgement of the government officials.

Witch hunting is often accompanied with the infusion of mass hate. According to Ling (1996), mass hate is a form of social hysteria that emerges in response to a "socially stressful situation", especially in cases of a perceived threat to the moral boundaries of the community. Social stress may develop from shifts in authority or control and from the recognition of a boundary crisis. Advancement of mass hate additionally depends on the existence of groups which can be vilified. Ling (1996) also argues that mass hate is often established by identifying a 'scapegoat' as a powerful adversary, who, if not under control, will pose a threat to society. "Patterned labeling" is then used to identify the 'deviant' and to make the crisis tangible by drawing the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate behavior (Ling, 1996). In many cases, the deviant might also be subject to what Garfinkle (1956) called a "degradation ceremony" – a public act in which the accused is given a derogatory label and is publicly punished or compelled to recognize the moral superiority of the accusers. At the same time, as Ling (1996) argues, the definition of deviance may develop and change as the crisis continues and self-proclaimed "righteous believers" become more proficient in identifying the nuances of deviance.

Online mass hate in Thailand has proliferated, especially in the transitional period of the post-coup era. Cyber-smearing and systematic scapegoating have mushroomed to target people defined as 'Red Shirt', 'Red Shirt supporter', and 'opponent of the military government'. Patterned labeling such as 'anti-monarchy' (*Lom Chao*), 'traitor' (*Khaai Chad*), or other pejorative names have been created and used in degradation ceremonies where members of the pages collectively join in the process of cyber-libel to damage the reputation of an individual or a group.

THE RISE OF THE CYBER RIGHT-WING MOVEMENT

The emergence of the Thai right-wing movement in the post-Cold War period and especially after the 2006 coup is a subject that has gained little systematic investiga-

17 According to Rientong Nan-nah, the term garbage refers to those people who have never realized the royal grace of the King and who have continued to recklessly commit crimes of lèse-majesté. Those people, as Rientong insists, should not be considered human but the garbage of the country ("I Will Fight", 2015).

tion. Nidhi Eeowsriwong (2013), a renowned Thai historian and social critic, is probably the only scholar who attempted to explain the PDRC phenomenon. Lending on Hannah Arendt's (1973) notions of the "masses" and "totalitarianism", he understands contemporary Thai masses (i.e., members of the urban middle classes in Thai society who support the military regime) as the product of the totalitarian regime. Nidhi (2013) understands the mass as the power basis of a totalitarian dictatorship. The mass is neither mobs, nor classes, but consist of atomized individuals. Isolated and having no tie to any political party or social relations, masses are prone to be indoctrinated toward unconditional loyalty to the totalitarian regime. Well-aware of the differences between the WWII Europe and present-day Thailand, Nidhi (2013) argues that a totalitarian-styled political movement is on the rise in Thailand. Similar to the Nazis in interwar Europe, the PDRC's adherents – people who are "free from all attachments that they once had", "unable to think anything aside from competing in the market in order to preserve their lives", finding their lives "bleak, desolate, and meaningless", "abandoned by politicians, by bureaucrats, by the media, by everything that comprises their existence" – yearn to be mobilized as part of the "meaningful" political movement (Nidhi, 2013).[18]

Thai society, Nidhi (2013) argues, is transforming into an atomized and isolated mass-based entity where the members' radical loss of self-interest and indifference has turned their passionate inclination toward the only remaining string of obligation – their superfluous loyalty to the monarchy. Since loyalty to the monarchy is the only social and moral bond between the masses and the nation, the only way to maintain this bond is to 'unfriend' (in the online realm) or to physically get rid of those who do not share the same loyalty.

The online surveillance masses who represent the contemporary right-wing movement, adhere to certain political views, despite their overall distrust in political parties. Believing that social stratification and inequality are natural, normal, or even desirable, the Thai right-wing masses justify their position by referring to the basis of natural law and the claim of the Thai traditional principle of morality (*Khwaamdi*, *Khunnatham*). Although their political views resonate with those of the previous right-wing forces in the 1970s, the components of the 21st century Thai masses are different from those of their predecessors. They are not rural or gangster-like Village Scouts, Red Gaurs[19] or *Nawapon*[20] , organized by the elite classes. On the contrary, these masses consist of educated tech-savvy middle-class urbanites, who are

18 See also an excellent review of Nidhi Eeowsriwong's articles by Tyrell Haberkorn (2014).

19 The Red Gaur or *Krathing Dang* was a right-wing paramilitary organization established by the Internal Security Operations Command of the Thai military to counter the country's student movement after the democratic revolution of October 1973. Members of the group composed of resentful, young, unemployed, vocational school students, and high school drop-outs, while the major cadres were veterans of the Vietnam War, former mercenaries in Laos, and former army soldiers dismissed for disciplinary contraventions (Baker & Pasuk, 2009, p. 192).

20 The *Nawapon* (new force/ninth force) was a right-wing group of militia, police, Buddhist monks, and others, active during Thailand's short democratic period in the mid-1970s. The organization was supported by the Internal Security Operations Command of the Thai military with an aim to counter the people deemed subversive or communist, including students and members of the labor union. Key supporters included Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, a monk popular among the right-wing who notoriously stated that killing communists was not demeritorious (Baker & Pasuk, 2009, p. 192).

capable to work both independently and collectively. Unlike the Red Shirt movement whose network and decisions to act are tied to the *Pheu Thai Party* (PTP) and directives by the *Bangkok United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship* (UDD); these right-wing masses are not based on any formal structures. Since they are individuals who are loyal to the only one supreme monarch, they are ready to form coalitions with any group of people who share the same ultra-royalist ideology. The ability to form coalition across classes has more or less contributed to both the success of the PDRC's movement in general (Pitch Pongsawat, 3 April 2015) and the strength of cyber surveillance by the masses in particular. In the post-PDRC movement, these atomized coalitions have transformed themselves into the surveillance mass of cyber witch hunters who have moved their battlefield from Ratchadamnoen Road to cyberspace. With or without the military regime, this right-wing movement will continue to sustain itself and work as a counter-movement against the perceived anti-monarchy network.

NORMALIZATION OF SURVEILLANCE

In the UK, Wood and Webster (2009) used closed-circuit television (CCTV), also known as video surveillance, to demonstrate how, despite its ineffectiveness, this form of modern surveillance has gained popular enthusiasm and demand. The authors identify at least four reasons: First, as a 'security theater' CCTV symbolizes safety in a society where everything is seen to be a potential source of risk, and where fear dominates – as a stage-set form of security, it is a symbol and a performer that deals with risk. Second, CCTV acts in the name of care as much as control. Third, CCTV has become part of the cultural landscape of Britain; members of the society have not only been used for surveillance but have also enjoyed it in a certain way. Fourth, CCTV offers a visual narrative by which watchers are being animated, as if they were watching a TV soap opera – investing feelings and personalizing its contents (Wood & Webster, 2009).

In Thailand, surveillance has become an everyday experience, partly through the military discourse of "returning the happiness [to Thailand]"[21]. Like CCTV in the UK, the Thai junta's Internet surveillance claims to act out of care and with the aim to prevent political risk. Alongside tight media, Internet censorship, and the arrest of political dissidents, the junta government launched the campaign "Returning Happiness to the People" aiming "to create an atmosphere to gain trust and build confidence" ("Thailand Military Leaders", 2014). Happiness, as claimed by Prime Minister

21 "Returning Happiness to Thailand" is a song promoted by the Thai military right after the 2014 coup. The lyrics were written by the junta leader and Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha which features lines such as "we offer to guard and protect you with our hearts" and "we are asking for a little more time" (Campbell, 2014). The discourse of "Returning Happiness to Thailand/Thai People" was subsequently turned into a military campaign and a Friday night show where the Thai prime minister appears on all free TV channels to address the nation and to provide updates about the work of the government. The Friday night show would usually run for an hour or longer in the time slot generally reserved for the soap operas. In response to the public complaint about the length of his weekly address at the prime time of the TV program, Prayuth stated that: "I talk on Fridays for you to listen and not just watch lakorns [soap operas]! I'll put up loudspeakers and broadcast into every village! Don't be bored by me – no PM has ever done such thing before!" (Saksith, 2015).

Prayuth, had long since gone from Thailand: "The Thai people, like me, have probably not been happy for nine years" (Hodal, 2014). In the months following the 2014 coup and amidst military threats in various media, including social media, a song titled "Returning Happiness" was written by Prayuth himself, free concerts with female dancers dressed in revealing military fatigues were organized, public petting of horses was provided by the army's mounted guard, and Prayuth's weekly TV show, in which he sometimes speaks for more than an hour, was aired every Friday night.

As Wood and Webster (2009) recognize, surveillance works at the level of emotions, symbols, and culture. The normalization of surveillance becomes consolidated when surveillance colonizes these domains. Thus, it is not only the proliferation of surveillance technologies that makes surveillance an everyday experience, but also the way in which surveillance operations are embedded in the norms and institutions of society. In justifying the military's takeover of the country and its subsequent draconian surveillance scheme, Prayuth cited the loss of the Thai value of morality, which he claimed had been destroyed by politicians and prolonged political divisions: "People started to lose trust and faith in the whole system . . . laws were not being respected. We were thus becoming an immoral society". This was the central reason to stage the coup and put the country back in 'order':

> A society without morality, without virtue, without good governance, could not move forward, . . . we were unhappy, so I had to ask myself, 'Can we let this continue?' . . . So, what we are doing today is to try and bring everything back to normal. We intend to return happiness to everyone. ("Thai Police Threaten", 2014)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON CYBER DYSTOPIA

Over the past two years since the 2014 coup d'état, mass surveillance in the name of 'happiness' has become a 'normal' part of everyday life, while the violation of human rights has become an anticipated form of governmentality by the urban masses. In response to media criticism, Prayuth confidently stated: "The coup d'état did not cause any trouble to people, except to those who lost their political power. Same with the draft of the Digital Bill . . . . What do you have to fear about if you have done nothing wrong?" (Royal Thai Government, 2015). The domestication of surveillance has not only brought surveillance closer to homes, but has also integrated it as part and parcel of 'good virtue'. Surveillance, as Prayuth's statement implies, creates "security" and "happiness", and not fear, for people of "good virtue" in Thailand.

The militarization of cyberspace through mass surveillance and surveillance by the masses, normalized by the everyday speech of "happiness" and the need to ensure a smooth transition of Thai society propagated by the military, continues to characterize contemporary Thailand. In a country where fear has been produced, manufactured, and woven into the discourse of security and morality, freedom of speech and expression has been cast out as 'un-Thai' and 'disloyal' to the nation. But as the line that separates right from wrong has never been clear but arbitrary, machinations of fear have become a flourishing industry which can be used by anyone to threaten political opposition. Furthermore, the definition of loyalty has now been extended

beyond the traditional sphere of monarchy-citizen relationships. A recent arrest of a man who shared a video alleged to mock and defame junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha (Pravit, 2016) suggests that Thai authoritarianism has been fortified and made untouchable by the tools and power of cyber technology. Cyber dystopia – a world in which the production of fear has been normalized, paternalized, and essentialized through the reification of the threat of violence and abjection – has become an everyday reality for Thai netizens (Linke & Smith, 2009). To avoid becoming a victim of such politics of fear, many people have no choice but to stay silent or inactive in order to live safely in the hegemonic totalitarian society.

Militarization of cyberspace in the post-coup era, as I have attempted to show, has not only created a geography of fear based on systematic inclusion and exclusion of particular groups of population, it has also created a desirable type of 'docile population' that could be seduced into obedience by the state's illusory promise of peace and happiness. The creation of new modes of surveillance organization and the expansion of the military ideology of surveillance into the civic realm have led to a redefinition of the concept of security. Cyber dystopia, in the form of a digital panopticon, and cyber cleansing have come to characterize the everyday 'security' of the Thai society.

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New Social Media and Politics in Thailand: The Emergence of Fascist Vigilante Groups on Facebook

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▸ Schaffar, W. (2016). New social media and politics in Thailand: The emergence of fascist vigilante groups on Facebook. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *9*(2), 215-234.

Since 2010, Facebook has become a battleground between competing political camps in Thailand. Facebook groups like the Social Sanction group, tellingly abbreviated as SS, and the Rubbish Collector Organization, which was founded in 2014 and has attracted more than 200,000 members, have played a crucial role in the process of political radicalization. The aim of these groups is to expose political opponents by accusing them of lèse-majesté, which can result in a prison sentence of 15 years or more. The groups also serve as fora for hate speech and are increasingly used as a tool of mobilization for state-sponsored mass events by the authoritarian regime that came to power with the coup d'état of May 2014. Contrary to its popular perception as a tool for democratization, Facebook has been successfully used by political groups reminiscent of fascist vigilante groups. This paper analyses the genesis of these groups and discusses the phenomenon in a broader political and historical context.

Keywords: Facebook; Fascism; Rubbish Collector Organization; Thailand; Vigilante Groups

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2015, a Red Shirt activist who identifies herself on Facebook as Tananun Buranasiri was targeted by a Facebook mob. During the campaign against her she was accused of having posted comments that were disrespectful of the monarchy and was threatened with accusations of lèse-majesté under Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code – a charge that can result in a prison sentence of 15 years. The Facebook mob even disclosed personal information about Tananun and her family, including the name of the shopping mall where she worked. When people started appearing in front of the particular shop, she was fired by her employer ("Red Shirt Sacked", 2015).

The campaign against Tananun Buranasiri was organized by a Facebook group called the Rubbish Collector Organization (RCO), which had more than 200,000 members in summer 2015. Judging by the daily number of likes and comments, the group was highly active between April 2014, when it was launched, and late 2015, when its founder, Rienthong Nanna, officially withdrew from it. The stated aim of the RCO was to "clean" Thailand of "social rubbish" – people, according to their definition, who were not loyal to the monarchy or who opposed the military coup d'état of May 2014 ("Doctor Sick of All", 2014).

The RCO has published lists of people who were subsequently targeted by both online as well as offline mob campaigns, such as the one against Tananun Buranasiri. The post about Buranasiri's dismissal alone drew more than 4,480 likes by August 2015, and followers of the group posted numerous comments insulting her and exchanging fantasies about how to "get rid" of her.

Figure 1. Screenshot, taken from the timeline of RCO Facebook group, May 2015, showing the campaign against Tananun Buranasiri. *In English: If no complaint has yet been filed against Tananun Buransiri, I and my team will do so beginning of next week. I beg you to be patient. Be sensible. General Rienthong Nanna, 10 May 2015*. (figure by the author).

The most serious incident that has been connected with such a campaign is the shooting of Kamol Duangphasuk, a well known writer and poet who took the side of the Red Shirts in his work. Although it has never been solved, Kamol's assassination coincided suspiciously with the founding of the RCO, which had launched one of its first campaigns against him and whose members applauded his assassination (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Apart from bullying individuals, RCO's Facebook group also served as a forum in which members publicly displayed their loyalty to the monarchy by means of, for example, photos of public performances of the royal anthem or joining public events in honor of the King or Queen. Iconic examples include the campaigns "Bike for Mom" and "Bike for Dad", through which the heir to the throne, who meanwhile has become King himself, called on Thai citizens to join a biking tour around the city to express their loyalty and gratitude on the occasions of the Queen's and the King's birthdays. Mobilizing for and documenting mass events like this was the second major function of the RCO Facebook group. The peculiar mixture of violence against political opponents and mass mobilization is reminiscent of political processes and strategies typical of the ascent of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s in Europe. In those times, ultra-nationalist vigilante groups mobilized to intimidate left-wing political opponents and create political chaos, with the ultimate aim of abolishing parliamentarian regimes. Mass events then mobilized popular support for authoritarian regimes to be set up. It was hardly by accident that the predecessor of the RCO on Facebook was a group called Social Sanction, abbreviated as SS.

The establishment and success of the RCO is a disturbing example of how social media is being used in contemporary Thailand in times of deepening political conflict. Contrary to its popular perception as a tool for democratization, Facebook has been successfully used by political groups in a way reminiscent of fascist vigilante groups. The aim of this paper is to present an analysis of the genesis of social-media based vigilante groups as a first case study. The problem, however, seems to have a wider significance which goes beyond the scope of this paper, but will be touched upon in the final remarks.

FACEBOOK

Facebook was founded in 2004 as a social networking platform at Harvard University, based on the university's printed yearbooks or "facebooks" (Marichal, 2012, p. 3). After expanding to other US universities and colleges in 2005, it was opened to the broader public in 2006 and experienced explosive growth in the following years. By July 2010, Facebook had amassed 500 million users (Marichal, 2012, p. 4) and surpassed one billion in the third quarter of 2012. Facebook has kept growing, due especially to its expansion into new geographic areas and sectors of society. Between 2013 and 2016, the biggest growth rates in terms of Monthly Active Users (MAUs) was achieved not in the US and Canada or Europe, but in the Asia-Pacific region and in what Facebook statistics refer to as the "Rest of the World" (Constine, 2016). By April 2016, Facebook counted over 1.65 billion MAUs, which means that the network enjoyed a steady growth rate of 15% per year (Zephoria, 2016). In 2015, social media had become the most important driver of all website referral traffic (DeMers, 2015), accounting for more than 31%. Facebook had a share of 25% and has left behind all major competitors (DeMers, 2015), including blogs, Google+, and also networks relying on mobile Internet, such as WhatsApp or Instagram.

Facebook, as the biggest social network site, has at the time of writing, effectively become a synonym for the Internet as such. The enormous growth of Facebook has attracted many researchers and there has been steep growth in social science research into the phenomenon (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012). Despite the high output of scientific papers, however, it is safe to say that Facebook is still an underresearched phenomenon. This is due to the fact that the company does not disclose its data, unlike Twitter, for example, that gives all tweets to the Library of Congress and has thus attracted a huge number of researchers. Due to its personal character as well as the company's business interests, Facebook data are not public and are difficult to extract. Other factors complicate empirical research further. Facebook is continuously developing its technical applications, which often leads to fundamental changes. The site also keeps changing its privacy policy, which makes it difficult even for the user to keep track of which content is visible to whom. Hence why empirical social science research has to rely on conventional methods of data collection. The study presented here relies on an analysis of screenshots of postings found in the RCO Facebook group in summer 2015. In order to access the postings, the author and a research assistant registered as members of the group. In addition to this, single informal interviews were conducted via the chat application of Facebook with selected group members. However, the motivation for and an important background to this

study are interviews and informal talks with Thai friends and colleagues who were threatened or targeted by violent attacks connected with Facebook.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPACT OF FACEBOOK

That the Internet has triggered tremendous changes in social interaction worldwide is a commonplace observation. When the uprising in the Arab world in 2011 was dubbed a 'Facebook Revolution', the moniker expressed that even pivotal political developments may be traced back to the impact of specific communication technologies.

This utopist-decisionist view of the Internet can most adequately be described as a technical modernization theory: Due to a technical innovation, entire societies undergo fundamental change in spheres including social relations, forms of production, and political regimes. The expectation is that the Internet creates a new public sphere (Castells, 2008) where, due to the technical specification of the new communication channels, citizens can meet on more equal terms, civil society can organize better, and deliberation can be more inclusive and more effective.

Many expectations regarding the spread of the Internet have not come to pass. Singapore is an example where the government has supported 100% broadband Internet access in the city but has at the same time kept the authoritarian regime in power. George (2007) and Lee (2010), drawing on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, have analyzed how the government of Singapore used the technical specifications of blogs, tailored legislation, and calibrated coercion to trigger self-censorship and even broaden the surveillance of their population. With its successful policy of containment, Singapore has served as a laboratory for the design of authoritarian governance techniques that have subsequently been adopted and adapted by other governments, most prominently in China and Thailand. Moreover, it has been shown that existing inequalities concerning gender, race, and class are often reproduced and even enhanced on the Internet. The same holds true for global inequalities (Chang, Himelboim, & Dong, 2009; Graham, De Sabbata, & Zook, 2015).

Some scholars hoped that the spread of social media and social networking services would finally fulfill the promise of the Internet, which had not been realized by classic Internet applications. In contrast to the old model of setting-up and maintaining static homepages, Facebook allows for a truly reciprocal exchange of data and opinions. The classic gap between sender and receiver is absent, and sharing has become the keyword for data exchange and Facebook (Van Dijk, 2013). Moreover, early versions of Facebook which allowed users to change names and maintain several profiles made it possible to practice anonymity and fluid identities. On this basis, scholars saw in it the advent of a true network society (Castells, 2008; Shirky, 2009).

Many analyses of Facebook have, however, pointed in another direction. In contrast to the utopist-decisionist view, and as a reaction to the disillusionment with empirical evidence, some analyses have posed their focus less on technical solutions and more on the 'technology in use'. These constructivist approaches stress that technical applications are embedded in and shaped by social and political processes. The amount of information available on the Internet, for example, seems to exceed the capacity of Internet users to process it – to discern its quality, reflect on it, or use it for

meaningful deliberation (Marichal, 2012, p. 19). Rather than using the abundance of shared high-quality information, users are distracted by Twitter posts and Facebook status updates. As early as 2010, a Pew report found that young people's use of the Internet showed a tendency to move away from content-sharing sites like YouTube and blogs and toward sites focused on social networking (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010).

In addition to this cloud of banality, the Internet and social media in general display a tendency toward fragmentation. Instead of making use of the possibility of exchanging views with people from all strands of life, users are linking up with those they already know or with whom they agree politically. Quantitative research into political blogs has shown that the exchange of opinions among bloggers largely remains within homogeneous groups. References to blogs expressing rival opinions are far less common than references to blogs that express the same opinion. The blogosphere thus mirrors the political divides within society. Moreover, in referring to pieces that express the same opinions, these groupings function as echo chambers, radicalizing the positions and arguably exacerbating political polarization (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Lawrence, Sides, & Farell, 2010; Sunstein, 2004, 2009). This tendency, also known as *selectivity bias*, is also evident in Facebook networks (boyd, 2010). As for the situation in Thailand, the tendency of Facebook groups to act as echo chambers, whereby people exchange and discuss their views with those of a similar opinion, is clearly borne out (Grömping, 2014).

Another critical question is how far Facebook supports or furthers political engagement. Indeed, analyses have shown that Facebook users are more politically active than average (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2010; Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014). A closer look into what kind of political activity is supported by Facebook reveals that, like other Internet-based platforms, it leads not to engagement in the sense of a physical presence, but to what Morozov (2011) and Gladwell (2010) respectively termed *slacktivism*. Online activism – so it seems – substitutes low-cost, low-benefit political behavior for meaningful political engagement (Gladwell, 2010; Marichal, 2012; Morozov, 2011).

Another dilemma facing social science research into the political effects of Facebook appears with respect to right-wing or fascist groups. With the rise of right-wing and fascist groups in many different countries, research has been conducted into how these groups use the Internet (Caiani & Kröll, 2015; Caiani & Parenti, 2013; Froio & Gattinara, 2015; Tateo, 2005). It has been shown that right-wing groups are making good use of the opportunities offered by Internet-based communication – circumventing national legislation banning fascist activities and using the Internet for in-group organization as well as outreach. Whereas the possibilities of the Internet are perceived as positive opportunities when used by democratic social movements in authoritarian contexts (Etling, Faris, & Palfrey, 2010; Laer & Aelst, 2010), the same features appear dangerous when it comes to fascist mobilization.

POLITICAL CONFRONTATION IN THAILAND

The current political divide between the Red and Yellow camps in Thailand started as an intra-elite conflict when Thaksin Shinawatra became prime minister in 2001

(Kasian, 2016; Montesano, Pavin, & Aekapol, 2012; Pasuk & Baker, 2008, 2009; Pavin, 2014). The two factions that confront each other can be characterized as follows: On the one side are the Red Shirts – a coalition of party followers and business partners of Thaksin. The grassroots followers are mainly lower middle-class people and politicized farmers from the North and Northeast who have profited from Thaksin's infrastructure and social security programs (Walker, 2012). A growing group of supporters are also drawn from social movements for democracy, consisting of newly politicized citizens opposed to the involvement of the military in politics and the unconstitutional maneuvers through which the Yellow Shirts and their parliamentary arm, the Democrat Party, monopolize power (McCargo & Naruemon, 2011; Montesano et al., 2012). On the other side are the old Bangkok elites – also a broad coalition of social forces that have been dubbed Yellow Shirts: royalist conservative circles and business people connected to the Crown Property Bureau, with exclusive access to the judiciary and military and supported by Bangkok's upper middle class (Pye & Schaffar, 2008). The most important ideological focus for this group is a growing nationalism that puts the nation, the monarchy, and religion at its center and demands unwavering loyalty. The appeal to these principles, moreover, to a higher morality based on these principles, legitimizes their claim to political leadership. The numeric majority of the Red Shirts, however, is explained by populism, vote-buying, and corruption (Kasian, 2016; Thongchai, 2008, 2016).

The general trend, which has become more pronounced over the course of the years, was that the Red Shirts managed to win a vast majority in every free election with great ease. The Yellow Shirts, claiming that the electoral majority had been won through vote-buying or populism, challenged the government and managed to oust it by means of their privileged access to the judiciary and military (Pavin, 2014). This led to a stalemate between the two antagonistic camps – a constellation of power which was also typical of the situation in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, at the advent of fascist regimes.

FASCISM IN THAILAND

It is difficult to use the term *fascism* as an analytic concept. The notion is strongly associated with a specific period in European history between the 1920s and 1940s, when ultra-nationalistic parties in Italy took over the government and transformed the entire society (Bosworth, 2009).

The term fascism is derived from a term for Italian vigilante groups – *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (FIC) – that were supported by capitalists in northern Italy, with the aim of fighting the increasing influence of organized labor and communist groups in factories and among rural laborers. Under Mussolini's leadership, these vigilante groups grew strong enough to abolish the parliamentarian system and establish an authoritarian regime based on violence. Whether there is any central ideology behind fascism that can be defined like other political ideologies such as liberalism or socialism is contested. Roger Griffin (2003) argues that "generic fascism" can be pinned down by a single formula: Fascism is a "political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism"[1]. Among

1 Palingenetic means the idea of 'national rebirth'.

historians, however, this definition is met with considerable skepticism. Regimes in the Europe of the 1920s and 1930s varied considerably in their ideological orientations and, furthermore, many historians reject the idea of abstracting from historical cases to create an analytically meaningful concept of fascism. It is doubtful that such a concept can be translated to cases outside Europe and to different historical periods.

For Thailand, however, Griffin's concept seems to fit strikingly. During the course of the increasing antagonism between the Red and Yellow Shirts, the latter have focused their ideology increasingly on nationalistic concepts. In the present context, their morally charged appeal regarding nation, monarchy, and religion plays an increasingly central role. A fuzzy, morally charged code of 'Thai-ness' is posited as an antidote to the perceived decline of society. This Thai-ness serves as point of reference for the rebirth of the Thai nation, which is pressed on all sides by globalization, capitalism, and modernization (Thongchai, 2016).

Even more illuminating for an analysis of the current political situation in Thailand is the strand of research on fascism that focuses on the role of vigilante groups. Not only in Italy but in most other European countries vigilante groups were instrumental to the rise of fascism. In Austria, for example, there was the *Heimwehr* – diverse groups and remnants of the imperial army in rural areas, supported by clerical-conservative elites and acting to counter the successful organization of the social democrats, communists, and organized labor (Tálos, 2013). Instead of focusing on ideology, Bonapartist theories of fascism put class constellations and the role of vigilante groups at the center of analysis (Saage, 2007). At the time of the rise of fascism, various European countries' political landscapes were characterized by a stalemate between two antagonistic blocks. On one side were socialist parties and organized workers who successfully used the young parliamentarian system to gain influence, but were unable to take political power completely. On the other side, conservative capitalist elites were entrenched in political institutions and held on to power. In this stalemate, and under the specter of a world economic crisis, the middle classes/bourgeoisie sided with monarchic-conservative elites (Borworth, 2009; Tálos, 2013). Vigilante groups were employed to intimidate organized labor and create chaos, thereby legitimizing the dissolution of the parliamentarian system and the establishment of an authoritarian regime. The bourgeois sectors of society thus opted to give up their political and democratic rights in order to keep their socially and economically privileged position.

Vigilante groups in Thailand working in the above-mentioned ways are not a new phenomenon. Paramilitary groups founded and supported by conservative and right-wing forces in Thailand have a long history going back to the times of when Thailand played a crucial role in the geopolitical strategy of the USA to contain communism in Southeast Asia. As a bulwark against a spill-over of communist movements in Indochina, Thai authorities spread a strictly anti-communist propaganda and fought the Thai Communist Party, which retreated to waging a guerrilla war in the Northeast. Accompanying the Four Cuts anti-insurgency policy, the *Royal Thai Army's Internal Security Operations Command* (ISOC) founded scouting and paramilitary groups as a rural defense against communism and all kinds of opposition forces. *Village Scouts* and *Red Gaurs* played an infamous role in a 1976 massacre when the military staged a

coup d'état closing the brief window of democracy which opened in 1973. The groups were brought to the capital and were instrumental to the atrocities carried out in downtown Bangkok, eradicating all resistance and intimidating any opposition ("Steady Rise of Fascism", 2014; Zimmerman, 1978).

FASCIST GROUPS IN THAILAND ON FACEBOOK

The emergence of vigilante groups on the Internet has grown out of specific historic circumstances: political developments and a deepening political divide; legal provisions in Thailand; and the rise of Facebook as the dominant social network.

Following the coup d'état of 2006, the military government began to introduce new mechanisms of Internet censorship. The military junta proclaimed a state of emergency and the institution of martial law, with the stated aim of uprooting 'political undercurrents' – a euphemism for the strong support for Thaksin in many parts of the country. Because of the self-censorship of the traditional media, anti-coup groups had to resort to Internet-based channels to organize. The censorship that was put in place to fight these new forms of organization was modeled after Singaporean laws and comprises tightened criminal provisions regarding lèse-majesté and new Internet-specific laws.

The tightening of Article 112, which punishes lèse-majesté with up to 15 years in prison, has made it into a catch-all to intimidate whomever is deemed a political enemy. A steep increase in cases shows that this section has been used almost arbitrarily to fight political opponents. Until 2005, there were about five cases of lèse-majesté per year. In 2007, however, military and royal conservatives started using the law systematically to silence political opponents. The number of cases exploded, with 478 in the year 2010 alone. The law was also considerably broadened in the course of political struggle. Originally, it was interpreted as covering the reigning King, but in 2013 a court ruling found a person guilty of defaming past kings, even those from distant history, as well as the pet dog of the King ("Thai Man Faces Jail", 2015). Sentences have also been continuously increased. In August 2015, Pongsak Sriboonpeng was sentenced by the Bangkok Military Court to 60 years – later reduced to 30 years – in jail for six alleged lèse-majesté Facebook postings ("Man Jailed for 30 Years", 2015).

In 2007, the Computer Crime Act was enacted by the military government. A censorship authority was created within the Ministry of the Interior which issues frequent bans against single websites. During the government of Prime Minister Abhisit, no less than 45,357 sites were blocked, 39,115 of which on the grounds of lèse-majesté (Saksith, 2014). After continuous criticism from various human rights and other political organizations, the number of lèse-majesté cases, as well as the circumstances of the accusations, alerted even the United Nations Security Council and led to criticism in the Universal Periodic Review process (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

In addition to criminalizing a number of computer-specific acts, the law introduced the stipulation that the Internet provider or owner of a website is liable for any content, including hyperlinks, comments, blogs, etc. With these provisions, and by means of applying the tightened Article 112 to Internet fora, the military government managed to close down or impose tight controls over most websites where political discussions were organized. Popular pages like Midnight University or *Prachatai* were

either shut down or, following the Singaporean model, targeted by spectacular court cases in which the providers or editors were held responsible for content allegedly insulting the monarchy. This functions as a means of creating insecurity or a 'chilling effect', triggering far-reaching self-censorship by the common user.

However, the Computer Crime Act only served this political purpose in the short term. Its limitations became clear when more and more videos and clips insulting the King appeared on YouTube as a means of protest. The government tried to hold YouTube responsible yet, after banning the site for some months, it reached an agreement with Google (the owner of YouTube) and the filter was lifted. Today, YouTube is flooded with dissident material about the monarchy. Facebook too has become an arena where individuals have been able to found groups and create fora that are out of the reach of authorities. Recently, the military government has intensified its efforts to trace and prosecute Facebook users ("'Facebook 8' Case Shows", 2016). However, from 2010 on, social media like Facebook have become the main battlefield of political struggle. It was here that the first group showing fascist vigilante features appeared: Social Sanction, tellingly abbreviated as SS.

EARLY VIGILANTE GROUPS: SOCIAL SANCTION OR SS

This group was established against the background of the 2010 demonstrations of the Red Shirts, who showed a strong and impressive capacity to mobilize. Not only their numbers, but also the strength and persistence with which they struggled for their demand to hold snap elections, surprised the royalist-conservative government of Prime Minister Abhisit and political analysts alike. Using class terminology from feudal times to frame their battle as *Phrai* (commoners/slaves) against *Amat* (feudal lords) drew the question of the monarchy more into focus then at any other previous demonstrations (Montesano et al., 2012; Schaffar, 2010).

Already in 2009, there were single incidents of "cyber witch hunts" (Thai Netizen Network, 2012, p. 59). The first Internet forum where people were publically accused of lèse-majesté was a Facebook group with the title Rally Bangkokians to Oppose Evil Red Shirts (Thai Netizen Network, 2012, pp. 63, 77). However, the first group to operate systematically and with a broader impact was the Facebook group called Social Sanction (SS), founded in March 2010 (Thai Netizen Network, 2012, p. 63). The organizers of the group remained anonymous but declared in their Facebook description that their aim was to "unite Thais to expose crooks and defend the monarch by social sanction" (Thai Netizen Network, 2012, p. 66). The group operated for three years until it finally disappeared in July 2013 (Thai Netizen Network, 2014, p. 136). In the course of this time, about 40 people were publicly "exposed" (Thai Netizen Network, 2014, p. 135). The main activity through which people were targeted were postings, in which they were portrayed as disloyal to the monarchy and accused of lèse-majesté. If the accused answered to such postings, the campaign went into the next round – re-posting screenshots of such reactions with more defamatory comments. The main issue was not so much to present legally sound evidence of lèse-majesté, but to attack individuals with the more general accusation of being 'un-Thai'. "Thai-ness under absolute monarchy" was the main ideological point of reference, as illustrated by postings like: "[W]hoever questions, criticizes or does not express love toward the monarch is considered alien, ungrateful, and evil" (Thai Netizens Network, 2014, p.

67). Supporters of the exiled Prime Minister Thaksin were insulted with terms common among Yellow Shirts, like 'red buffalo'. They were also called ungrateful, 'traitor', or 'dead wood'. Comments publicly suggested that they should be lynched.

In addition to this core activity, the page also served as a forum for exchanging political opinions by posting and commenting on news. The exchanges, however, followed the same logic as the defamations of individuals and reproduced the discourse of "Thai-ness under absolute monarchy" (Thai Netizen Network, 2014, pp. 67-68). Thus, the SS group can be characterized as a mixture of echo chamber and slacktivism. Defaming comments reproduced and amplified a nationalist-royalist discourse about Thai-ness. Attacking individuals through Facebook posts and calling, or supporting a call, for action against them was framed as political activism or a social sanction. The difference in the forms of slacktivism was, however, that the accusation of lèse-majesté, launched by a simple click on the Internet, was and is a dangerous weapon and can have serious consequences under Thai legislation. The cyber-mobbing led by groups like SS, which used the draconian Article 112 as a threat against political opponents, and various counter-campaigns using fake online profiles to equally expose opponents to Article 112 prosecution, led to a veritable cyber guerilla war which only eased up with the election of Yingluck Shinawatra and the stabilization of politics (Thai Netizens Network, 2014, p. 135). SS was dissolved, however, as a consequence of a flawed campaign and public outcry against it: In July 2012, it launched a campaign against a Lt. Col. Sopa but, lacking a photo, used a picture found on the Internet. When it became clear that the image was of the wrong person, it led to an outrage in the Internet community and SS was closed down (Thai Netizens Network, 2014, p. 138).

PROFESSIONALIZATION AND STATE-SUPPORTED VIGILANTE GROUPS: CYBER SCOUTS

The process through which a new generation of Facebook-based vigilante groups emerged in 2014 cannot be understood without the government's *Cyber Scouts* program, which was launched in December 2010 by the royalist-conservative government of Abhisit Vajjajiva and under the leadership of the *Ministry for Information and Communication Technology* (MICT). In seminars at universities and schools, pupils and students were recruited to join a now state-organized group to search the Internet for cases of lèse-majesté and other offences (Farelli, 2010; Rook, 2011). Volunteers could register on a website and, as part of their one-day training, received ideological instructions on the history and importance of the monarchy as well as on Facebook's technical specifications. The Scouts' work included incognito methods such as befriending suspects on Facebook and starting conversations about sensitive issues. In the case of a breach of lèse-majesté laws, the Scout would then warn the person or hand over the case to the authorities. The name Cyber Scouts clearly alludes to the vigilante groups of the 1970s when Village Scouts and Red Gaurs were mobilized against the student movement (Farelli, 2010; Saksith, 2010; "Steady Rise of Fascism", 2014). These early programs of state-supported Internet-based spying groups were phased out when the government of Yingluck Shinawatra took office in 2011 but were relaunched after the coup d'état of summer 2014 – this time in an even

more comprehensive way and with more financial support from the MICT (Saksith, 2014). We have not been able to pin down whether people taking part in the Cyber Scout programs have later taken an active role in the Facebook-based vigilante groups. Arguably, the program in 2010, however, had a more general effect beyond the immediate results of the Cyber Scouts scanning activities. The very existence of such a program and the fact that it was initiated by the state administration put activities like the ones performed by SS in a different light. Instead of political guerilla campaigns, launched by a sectarian group of radical Yellow Shirts, it now appeared as state-sponsored, morally valuable political activity serving the nation.

THE RUBBISH COLLECTOR ORGANIZATION

A new round of mobilization of vigilante groups was launched in late 2013 when Yingluck Shinawatra was prime minister (2011-2014). Despite the fact that Yingluck had won the 2011 elections with the support of the Red Shirts, her administration was characterized as low profile and reluctant as far as pressing political issues for the Red Shirts were concerned. This was often interpreted as a strategy not to create any pretext for the Yellow Shirt camp to mobilize against her. Especially with regard to the tightened lèse-majesté laws and the legal investigation into the violent crackdown against the Red Shirts in 2010, Yingluck remained largely silent. Despite this, the Yellow camp started mobilizing for demonstrations in Bangkok to oust the government in late 2013. In January 2014, Yellow Shirt demonstrators pushed a campaign with the slogan "Shut Down Bangkok – Restart Thailand" and blocked the central traffic hubs of downtown Bangkok. Giant screens at the central protest stages and nationwide broadcasting via television channels and printed media, which are close to the royal conservative camp, were a clear sign of the financial and logistical support of influential elite circles. On stage, the speakers demanded that elections be abolished and the parliament be replaced by an appointed reform committee. This situation – the middle-class plus elite mobilization against a popularly supported government, the demand for the abolition of the parliamentary system in favor of a corporate system of representation, and the legitimization in the name of ultra-nationalist salvation of the country – comes very close to the situation in several countries of Europe at the advent of fascism, especially Austria in the 1930s and Portugal in the late 1920s (Tálos, 2013). In this constellation of power, vigilante groups re-emerged and played a crucial role in the political struggle of the Yellow Shirts against the government and its supporters, the Red Shirts. They were instrumental in paving the way to the coup d'état in May 2014 and the establishment of the authoritarian regime under Prayuth Chan-o-cha.

During the demonstrations, armed security groups who started using violence against political opponents were formed around the stages. For example, groups of security guards formed motorcycle convoys and started 'visiting' government politicians at their houses amid a climate of rising violence. When Yingluck Shinawatra called for snap elections, these guards attacked citizens who wanted to register for voting. On Facebook too, a new vigilante group was established which appeared more professional and with a tighter organizational backbone: the Rubbish Collector Organization (RCO).

From the very beginning, the RCO used a strategy that was considerably different from that of the SS. The RCO combined the established forms of guerilla/mobbing activism with a professional military organization structure, which was made public by a well-designed offline narrative. Moreover, in contrast to SS, which operated as a small and anonymous group of radical Yellow activists, the RCO styled itself as comprising common people from the streets who had come together due to the spur of indignation – a movement rather than a small, radical group. Instrumental to this new narrative was the public figure of the group's founder, Rienthong Nanna, who became the face of the group and embodied its specific features.

Rienthong Nanna is 55 years old and runs the family-owned Mongkhut Wattana General Hospital in central Bangkok. Before he took over the hospital in 2007, he worked in the Army Medical Department and held the rank of a major general. The establishment of the RCO was portrayed as Rienthong's personal initiative. When the RCO was launched on Facebook, Rienthong held a meeting in his hospital. The meeting, covered by the mainstream media, showcased him and his motivation. A central part of the narrative was that Rienthong is non-political, with no connection to any parties or political networks ("Call the Stop", 2014). Despite his lack of interest in politics, he had been drawn into that sphere by his indignation over the violence he presumed had been committed against Yellow Shirt members. Out of a deeply felt sense of injustice, he started joining the Yellow Shirt demonstrations more regularly in 2008 and eventually became an ardent supporter who also appeared at the protest staged during the 2013/2014 campaign ("Army's Job to Defend", 2014).

Rienthong combines the features of a *Wutbürger* (enraged citizen) with the determination and ruthlessness of a soldier. At the founding meeting of the group at his hospital, 30 former high-ranking army leaders were present ("Monarchists Vote to", 2014). Rienthong claimed that he was working on the establishment of a "people's army to protect the monarchy" ("Monarchists Vote to", 2014), and that the RCO was under the special protection of the army, which was promptly denied by army leaders ("Army's Job to Defend", 2014). The military structure behind the organization is, however, obvious. The group is organized in different units, among which is a "top secret surveillance command center" ("Doctor Sick of All", 2014). The exact structure of the group, which served the administrative requirements of its 200,000 members and steered online activities, was kept secret ("Doctor Sick of All", 2014). However, our analysis of online communications in July 2015 shows that, despite the large number of several hundred comments connected to one post, each comment was answered from Rienthong's personal account – a clear sign that there is a professional staff behind this account.

Also in stark contrast to the image of the 'common man of the streets' is the militancy and violence that was apparent in the language of the RCO's official proclamations and Facebook posts. Rienthong defined the aim of the group as to clean up Thailand's "social rubbish" and to "eradicate lèse-majesté offenders completely" within two years, where the word eradicate is the same Thai word previously used in slogans about "eradicating communism" ("Steady Rise of Fascism", 2014). Metaphors like: "When you first sweep the floor, the dust will be blown all over the place – but later the floor will look cleaner" (Rienthong in an interview with the Bangkok Post, "Doctor Sick of All", 2014) resemble a German proverb that was popular in the fascist

Figure 2. Screenshot, taken from the timeline of RCO Facebook group, May 2016, illustrating the campaign against Rose. (figure by the author).

period and was used to excuse the killing of people as 'collateral damage' for the sake of reaching a higher end.[2] Rienthong also compared himself with Van Helsing ("Doctor Sick of All", 2014) – the character fighting Dracula in fantasy films.

Like the SS, as its core activity, the RCO pursued campaigns to expose breaches of lèse-majesté, which were then notified to the police. However, the RCO went beyond this and systematically combined online and offline activism. As mentioned in the introduction to this article, Tananun Buranasiri lost her job when a mob started appearing in front of the shop where she worked. Another spectacular case is the systematic mobbing of Chatwadee Amorpat, also known as Rose, who works as a hair stylist in London and has become known as a Red Shirt activist and critic of the monarchy. Rose was named on RCO's 'most wanted' list along with several other prominent dissidents, many of whom are now living in exile. After her private address was revealed by the RCO, she was targeted by mobbing attacks in London. Incited by the RCO campaigns, Thai tourists as well as Thais living in Europe uploaded video clips showing how they had gone to Rose's house and sprayed slogans on her door or left

2 *"Wo gehobelt wird, fallen Späne"*, in English "where there is planing, shavings will fall", is said to have been the favored proverb of Hermann Göring. This only roughly corresponds to the English "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs".

bags of excrement in her mailbox. The mobbing against her went so far that her parents felt pressured to file a case of lèse-majesté against their own daughter (Gazeau, 2014).

Another example of offline action is the boycott against the Thai UNHCR. The impetus for this campaign was the case of Tang Achiwa, also known as Ekapop – a Red Shirt activist who was accused of lèse-majesté, managed to flee to Cambodia and, with the help of the UNHCR, was granted asylum in New Zealand. The RCO published, as a fake cover of a UNHCR report, a selfie showing Tang Achiwa and his partner holding new travel documents from New Zealand. Apart form the usual hate comments against Tang Achiwa, RCO members boasted of having canceled their donations to the UNHCR and openly threatened the institution: "I'll go and destroy the [UNHCR] donation booths and slap the staff. F*** UNHCR Thailand". After numerous Internet attacks, the Thai UNHCR branch had to shut down its Facebook page ("Thai Royalists Condemn", 2015; "Thai Royalists Threaten", 2015).

Figure 3. Screenshot, taken from the timeline of RCO Facebook group, May 2016, illustrating the campaign against the Thai UNHCR. (figure by the author).

The logic of these campaigns is similar to that of campaigns on the SS page. Cases were set upon the basis of pictures and reports added to the group's Facebook Timeline. This served as a crystallization point for the ordinary group members'

comments, which triggered an echo chamber effect that eventually swelled into hate speech. Within this cycle, Rienthong would take the role of a fatherly leader who calls for moderation among his followers, albeit without preventing the posting of calls for or documentation of violence.

The ritual performance of indignation, followed by hate speech and the documentation of actions, under the guidance of a fatherly but uncompromising and rigorous leader, was increasingly combined with calls for and documentation of mass mobilization of members 'performing' their loyalty to the monarchy. In this respect too, the RCO page constitutes a new development compared to the SS page. Whereas older Facebook pages served as fora for the documentation of private initiatives, the RCO's, with its prominent individual members and its mass membership, triggered a new effect. State-organized mass events were advertised on RCO, with an almost coercive effect on members to, at the very least, click the like button or post greetings like the ritual "Long live the King". One example is the campaigns "Bike for Mom" and "Bike for Dad", which aimed to promote the heir to the throne, Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, as dutiful son and legitimate successor. For this reason, Vajiralongkorn invited Thai citizens to join a public cycling event in Bangkok and other provincial capitals on the occasion of his mother, the Queen's, 83rd birthday.

Uniformed in merchandise such as light blue t-shirts and flags, the cyclists were formed into three groups according to their social and political status and cycled along a course. Vajiralongkorn led Block A with the highest representatives of the state, including the supreme commander of the Royal Thai Army, the prime minister, and the president of the Supreme Court. Block B, with representatives of the private sector, NGOs, and high representatives of the bureaucracy, was headed by the Princess Bajrakitiyabha, daughter of the Crown Prince. Commoners cycled in Block C. This mobilization, organized along feudal lines representing the corporatist order of society favored by the royalist-conservative elites, was covered live on public TV channels and on the websites of the mainstream media ("Crown Prince Leads", 2015). Apart from various offline channels, participants were also mobilized through Facebook groups such as the RCO, where both events constitute the main activity since mid-2015.

This event (as well as its subsequent "Bike for Dad" counterpart, which followed the same choreography) performed a mass mobilization in corporatist formations that strikingly resembled fascist mobilizations in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Back then, coerced mobilization served to organize support for authoritarian regimes. In Germany, this process slipped into the totalitarian system of National Socialism where the distinction between private and public was dissolved in order to exert total control over the individual.

CONCLUSION

In Thailand, we can observe how vigilante groups emerged on Facebook. Ideologically, these groups come close to Griffin's (2003) definition of palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism, and thus qualify as fascist groups. Their role in a specific constellation of power, as it is analyzed in Bonapartist theories of fascism, is even more striking. Vigilante groups such as the SS or the RCO perform public witch hunts against

people whom they accuse of being disrespectful of the monarchy. The intimidation of political opponents and the creation of a climate of fear was instrumental in bringing about a perceived state of emergency, which helped to discredit and abolish the parliamentary system in favor of the current corporatist, authoritarian regime. Later, after the takeover of the military, groups like the RCO shifted their focus and helped to organize mass events where loyalty to the monarchy and the corporatist order of society is performed.

The vigilante groups have grown out of specific historic circumstances: the deepening political divide, specific legal provisions in Thailand, and the rise of Facebook as the dominant social network site. It has been shown that all these circumstances were equally important and equally constitutive for the groups. In this respect, the present approach differs from studies cited above where Fascist groups in Italy, Spain, or other countries are seen as a phenomenon of offline politics, as groups who – in addition to their offline activities – use the communication, organization, and mobilization opportunities of social media. Further studies on similar groups will be needed to get a more complete picture of the recent rise of vigilante groups on the Internet. A crucial question to ask will be in how far the specific features of Facebook, the general trend toward political polarization, and more or less dormant legacies of Fascist vigilantism are interlinked.

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Changing Media Ecologies in Thailand: Women's Online Participation in the 2013/2014 Bangkok Protests

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▸ Guntarik, O., & Trott, V. (2016). Changing media ecologies in Thailand: Women's online participation in the 2013/2014 Bangkok protests. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *9*(2), 235-252.

Traditionally marginalized groups now have more access to new and unconventional means to participate in politics, transforming the media ecologies of existing political environments. Contemporary feminist scholarship has centered on how women use new media technologies to serve political agendas. However, this literature focuses predominately on women in the West, while women in developing countries, or Asia more generally, have been largely excluded from analysis. This article aims to fill this gap by examining Thai women's online activities during the 2013/2014 Bangkok political protests. Specifically, we ask how the rise of social and digital media has altered what it means to participate politically in the context of Thai women's present-day political experience. To answer this question we looked at how women resorted to various digital and social media to discuss women's rights and political issues, including Yingluck Shinawatra's political leadership as Thailand's first female prime minister (2011-2014). Moving beyond traditional notions of participation, we argue that there is a need to recognize the emerging dynamics of women's online engagement in the political landscape of Thailand. In the context of a totalitarian state, speaking out against the ruling authority online embodies an additional layer of citizen resistance, a feature of digital life that is often taken for granted in Western democracies.

Keywords: Bangkok Protests; Digital Activism; Media Ecologies; Participatory Politics; Yingluck Shinawatra

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INTRODUCTION

Emerging social and digital media practices have increased the interest concerning the use of digital technologies for political and civic engagement. For some researchers, this has meant a re-evaluation of what it means to engage politically in the digital era. Scholars have asked whether earlier ideas about political participation from the pre-digital age can still be applied to new forms of participation today. They also question whether a rethinking is required around how political participation has developed over time and altered in the light of the changes instigated by online technologies. These questions sit at the heart of much recent literature on social movements, which has often privileged major mass mobilizations, such as those that began in 2011 in the Arab world (Alterman, 2011; Bruns, Highfield, & Burgess, 2013; Daoudi & Murphy, 2011; Harlow & Guo, 2014; Khondker, 2011; Lim, 2012).

Those who have engaged with the Arab movements highlighted predominantly the experiences of young men, or men more generally, and disregarded the political experiences of women. Researchers who have concentrated on women, specifically focused on women in the West (boyd, 2011; Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012), while the experiences of women in non-Western countries have been largely overlooked. Hence, this article seeks to fill this gap in research by discussing women's online political participation in Asia, with a particular focus on Thailand. It is designed to contribute to emerging ideas of digital participation through its analysis of Thai women's online political engagement. We are interested in understanding the extent to which feminist-inspired approaches (Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012) toward the nature of participation are applicable in the Thai case. Despite the diverse and highly complex political conditions in Asia today, we want to explore the relevance of existing research on women's online political participation for women in non-Western contexts. We ask: How has the rise of social and digital media altered what it means to participate politically, particularly in the context of Thai women's political experiences and online practices?

Up to date, there have been only a few studies that examine women's online participation in Thailand (see Balassiano & Pandi, 2013; Enteen 2005). However, there has been a strong interest on the broader issue of political engagement in Thai protests, which provides useful methodological approaches to analyzing online content (Nyblade, O'Mahony, & Sinpeng, 2015). Other studies have looked at the role of physical and virtual spaces in fostering civic society (Balassiano & Pandi, 2013). With regard to the online practices of women, Enteen (2005) examined how Thai women responded to oppressive images through online discussion forums. This latter study found that Thai women were able to use online forums to subvert stereotypes of themselves as highly sexual and subservient to Western men. It revealed that online forums facilitated these women's discussions, enabling Thai women to speak out in ways they would not have been able to without the Internet. As the author notes, "their participation create(s) new communities with constituents which extend the borders of the nation while reducing the power of national images" (Enteen, 2005, p. 477).

Enteen's research offers an early snapshot of the digital ways in which Thai women resisted gendered categories like sex worker and housewife. More recent studies similarly discussed the ways in which Thai women have negotiated their online sexual and gender identities (Pimpawun et al., 2013). Yet, neither Thai scholars nor others in the West have paid attention to Thai women's emerging forms of political participation in Thailand's digital space. By contrast, the more general issue of women's online political participation has gathered widespread interest among Western scholars. Their findings indicate that digital technologies have provided marginalized women in the West with alternative and unconventional avenues for political expression (boyd, 2011; Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). In other words, the Internet offers a different means for women to engage with political issues beyond the traditional structures of political engagement. We further assert that the digital environment is unconventional insofar as the political aspects of online participation resist being captured in traditional definitions of politics (e.g., voting, political party membership). Furthermore, we found that the political dimensions of

this participatory culture continue to be underestimated in existing theorizations of social and digital media.

It is in this spirit of analysis that we consider how new notions of participation might have relevance for Thai women's online engagement in political issues. Our study on women's participatory politics in Thailand seeks to determine what forms of online political participation exist among Thai women in Thailand. We draw on insights from feminist activism in other parts of the world in order to explore how new definitions of participation bear on the forms of online political participation emerging among Thai women today. As we will show, online forms of participation of Thai women qualify as feminist as they advance feminist goals, which include a recognition of the ways in which women become politically conscious and active. By applying these definitions of participation to Thai women's online activities, we have been able to take a closer look at a range of Thai women's political experiences and expressions. This has allowed us to consider the different ways in which women engage in protests in a country where access to politics and freedom of speech is still largely restricted.

Postill and Pink (2012) assert that social media platforms have created new sites for collaborative and participatory politics. They illustrate how Internet users engage in multiple platforms, devices, and mediums. This plurality of engagement requires a concept of sociality that recognizes the multiplicity and hybridity of the digital landscape and enables researchers to understand social media practices and their "relatedness in online and offline relationships" (Postill & Pink, 2012, p. 132). By lending on Postill and Pink's notion of the multiplicity of the digital landscape, we account for alternative and unconventional sites of engagement. Hence, we deviate from former definitions of participation developed prior to the 'Internet revolution'. Verba and Nie (1972, pp. 2-3), for example, define political participation as the behavior that affects policy and political processes. They exclude what they consider as "passive acts", such as activities that lie outside the sphere of government (e.g., civil disobedience or violence). Hence, they do not include actions such as protest activities, the shaping of people's political attitudes by their peers, or any expressions of support for or disapproval of political issues.

Critics have been quick to fault such definitions of participation as too narrow. Harris (2004, 2008), for instance, asserts that notions of political participation which define participation exclusively within the confines of formal politics are too restrictive. We suggest that such notions limit the ability to understand women's participatory behavior in environments where media ecologies are recognized as increasingly interrelated, overlapping, and woven into the political and social fabric of society. Opening up the definition of participation to incorporate unconventional sites and means of participating in political discussions has allowed us to assess the range of ways in which women share, engage in dialogue, and influence one another through their online practices and activities. These alternative forms of participation constitute a new dynamic of engagement in women's contribution to the political landscape in Thailand, and contain theoretical implications for engaging with complex and changing media ecologies, including the broader spheres of women's political participation and digital political communication in Asian contexts.

THEORIZING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The rise of social and digital media has forced scholars to re-conceptualize what it means to participate politically. Recent perspectives on participation emphasize the role of social and digital media in contemporary global mass events (Daoudi & Murphy, 2011; Harlow & Guo, 2014). For instance, research on the use of digital technologies reveals the need to understand participation from the perspective of technology-enabled events and altered political and social landscapes (Bruns et al., 2013; Chambers, 2013; Harris, 2008; Vromen, 2011). For some scholars, regardless of the digital space, the participation of individuals is inextricably tied to the political environment. In these contexts, the research emphasis lies on the relationship between people and the state, rather than people and technologies (Morozov, 2011). For others, the focus lies on 'practice' or the different kinds of activities that occur around new technologies (Pink, 2001). Some researchers of the digital highlight the need to see the interactions these technologies enable, not only as having *mass* appeal, but also as a distinctive *social* phenomenon (Goggin & Crawford, 2011; Hinton & Hjorth, 2013). Morozov (2011) offers similar views on political participation in the context of digital media, although he cautions against those whom he accuses of holding steadfast to a cyber-utopian worldview and equating technology with democracy. For others, technology has been embraced as an emancipatory force that ushers in revolutions that can topple tyrannical dictatorships (e.g., Castells, 2012; Khondker, 2011). In such instances, participation in the political sphere is overlooked in favor of the enabling functions of technology, which are often regarded as a panacea.

Researchers like Lim (2012) and Alterman (2011), depart from such perspectives, choosing to see technology as neutral and arguing that it is the people using the technology who determine its power and potential. In their argument, they therefore underscore the power of Internet users in the political process. Technology is seen to advance social change only through its impact on social institutions and cultural domains. Analyzed from this perspective, people's online activities and multiple socialities are seen to influence the scope of their political engagement (Carlisle & Patton, 2013) or expressions of citizenship or civic values (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2009; Ratto, Boler, & Deibert, 2014; Vromen, 2011). These forms of participation can also be understood to fuel racial, religious, and hate-based violence (Foxman & Wolf, 2013) or be structured by gender, class, and ethnic differences (boyd, 2011; Manjima, Birchall, Caro, Kelleher, & Vinita, 2013). The underlying message is that participation should be conceptualized in the context of how people interact with technology in everyday life. Rather than viewing technology as a democracy-enabling tool, people's online practices and interactions through the use of social and digital media are considered central to the process of political participation.

What is crucial to all these debates is the role of the digital technology itself, and in essence its mobile and social dimensions, without which people are unable to participate to the extent that they have been able to in contemporary politics. Through this conceptual lens, communication technologies are understood as valuable sources of power and counter-power for social change. Castells (2007) claims that interactive and digital networks of communication have caused the rise of a new form of 'mass self-communication', offering social movements the power to com-

municate and organize themselves on a large scale. Yet, Castells is perhaps overly confident in his view of technology and its capacity for democratic and revolutionary purposes. He does not acknowledge the complex relationship between online and offline spheres of engagement and sociality, the boundaries of which are often blurred, overlapping, and indeterminate. It is thus not surprising that Castells tends to focus more on democratic action rather than participatory activity. We suggest that a study of participatory action sheds light upon politics from the participants' point of view. This approach complicates the ways in which participants' political views may be shaped, influenced, and shared along online and offline sites of encounter. Power relationships are not simply shaped and defined in digital spaces alone, but rather in the complex interaction between physical and digital environments (e.g., Lim, 2006).

Castells' view, hence, tends to overlook the types of social relations that are forged across both physical and virtual environments. For Castells (2007), the medium itself does not create actual content but enables "unlimited diversity" and the "autonomous origin of most of the communication flows that construct . . . meaning in the public mind" (p. 248). Yet, by essentially dismissing offline and face-to-face communication mediums, and positioning the public as wholly passive, Castells credits digital technologies with disproportionate power. In this article, we adopt a different stance, shifting agency back to the participants and focusing on their online practices in order to understand the nature of their participation. This approach allows us to engage with the experiences of the women who are in the focus of our study. We construe their online expressions as political, even if their behavior and activities may not constitute 'full' or formal participation in political life because of the obvious lack of traditional forms of political participation, such as party membership. We suggest that broadening the notion of participation to incorporate any form of political discussion in the digital space effectively diversifies the concept of participation. Such a perspective additionally complicates the potential of technology as a democratic resource. The people, who access digital technology to join political discussions, are understood as political actors through which forms of participation can be measured and scrutinized. The participants provide a way through which we can read, describe, and interrogate the political action, calling the premise of earlier conceptualizations of participation into sharp refute.

SITES OF PARADOX AND PROMISE

As noted above, in the digital era, there has been a shift away from construing political participation strictly within the official vernacular of politics. Women's political engagements in digital environments can be seen as constituting a form of political participation in its own right. Hence, such emergent practices invite us to modify earlier definitions of participation developed prior to the pervading of the Internet. In this article, we show how these online forms of participation were evidenced across a range of personal blogs, Facebook groups, and YouTube clips in both Thai and English language during the 2013/2014 Bangkok protests. We selected sites that included a social media platform, which allowed users to share, like, and comment on different topics, primarily women's issues. We looked at a cross-section of 100 of the most visited and popular websites, social media news coverage sites, and You-

Tube clips over a 12-month period as the 2013/2014 protests took place in Bangkok during the regency of Thailand's first female prime minister, Yingluck Shinawatra (2011-2014). We used Google Analytics to determine the most popular sites visited, particularly selecting sites where participants were critical of Yingluck's leadership. Viewpoints were selected based on their capacity to trigger multiple and immediate responses on her leadership and policies, as well as on their ability to facilitate dialogue across different social networks. We chose not to discuss viewpoints that were supportive of Yingluck as they tended only to reinforce each other and more rarely elicited a dialogue. We found that sites critical of Yingluck, besides reinforcing one another, also generated extended discussions on her leadership and policies.[1] Data was analysed using an open source social network analysis tool called NodeXL, as a form of basic knowledge management. Where the identity of the person was known on these sites, we have included their name and gender. While we focused primarily on female commenters, in the few cases where a person's name was not published it was difficult to ascertain gender.

Acknowledging that Yingluck did not campaign on women's issues directly, we selected sites where women discussed Yingluck's policies and her leadership qualities, as this is where we found that much of the discussion was centered during the protests. We did not include Yingluck's Facebook page, which had garnered more than 2.5 million likes at that time, as we found that her Facebook page attracted only her supporters and showed less critical comment on her government. Examining how women discussed women's issues in relation to Yingluck's leadership led us to websites that carried significantly more dissenting views.

With more than 40% Internet penetration in its Northern and Central regions, Thailand is experiencing one of the fastest adoption of digital technologies in Southeast Asia (Sureerat, 2012).[2] The rise of the Internet has transformed how people search for and share information, and thus altered Thailand's media ecologies, communicative processes, and modes of social and political organization. Our use of the term media ecologies resonates with Guattari's (2000) insistence to understand media and technology as intrinsically embedded in social relations, subjectivity, and the environment. We argue that Thai women are subverting the public/private sphere dichotomy through their multiple uses of technology. This suggests that the contemporary shifts between offline and online politics make it harder to contain notions

1 We looked at both viewpoints critical of Yingluck and viewpoints that supported her; for our analysis of Thai women's online political participation we chose the former since the flow of conversation they created online appeared more interrogative, reflective, and analytical in tone. The latter did not produce the same kind of flow of conversation as respondents tended to only concur with or endorse one another.

2 NECTEC statistics indicate that Internet penetration in Thailand has grown exponentially with up to 38,015,725 users online (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, n.d.). NECTEC's statistics indicate that Bangkok metropolitan areas have the highest rate of use with 56.3% of users residing in Bangkok. However, there were no major differences in the use of the Internet with regard to gender, with the exception of transgendered people who spent the most time online. While NECTEC's findings emphasize that communication via social networking sites is the most common activity by Thai users, it does not reveal how social networks are being used. ETDA's ICT report states that online use increased significantly between 2014 and 2015 (Electronic Transactions Development Agency & Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2016). The report notes that mobile devices are the most common way of accessing the Internet and the top three online activities of Internet users via mobile devices were communicating on social networks, web searching, and reading e-news.

of participation adequately within the strictures of the dominant political vernacular. Zizi Papacharissi (2015) highlights the value and importance of recognizing how personal expressions and experience in the digital figure as political. Discursive and affective expressions can "activate and sustain" a public or network by enabling and sharing feelings of belonging and solidarity (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 9). Such expressions can also influence the ways in which protests and political issues are framed by providing alternative accounts and experiences of events, thus questioning and contradicting the dominant narrative promoted by mainstream media. For Papacharissi (2015), "affective attunement" describes "liking a post on Facebook, . . . uploading and sharing a YouTube video, or using a meme generator to create and share a simple message" as "indicative of civic intensity and thus a form of engagement" (p. 25). She recognizes that in repressive regimes, citizens require courage to express views and opinions that disagree, undermine, and defy the ruling force; hence, their views become political simply by being voiced. This political dimension is significant because the actions of a group can then be situated across new conceptual frameworks for determining the rules of engagement.

THAI WOMEN'S POLITICAL VOICES

Yingluck Shinawatra came to power after a landslide victory in the 2011 Thai general elections. Her key campaign message at that time (in the aftermath of an extended series of political protests during the period from 2008 to 2010) was one of poverty eradication, corporate income tax reduction, and national reconciliation. Prior to her election, the government led by the Democrat Party incited anger amongst protesters who believed the group had masterminded a controversial legal and military move to establish governance. Protests escalated when attempts to negotiate a ceasefire failed and forced a military crackdown, seeing more than 100 people killed and thousands of others injured in the ensuing violent confrontations. The protesters included the *National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship* (UDD), also known as the 'Red Shirts', which called for an early election and demanded that the government stand down.

On a website that documents the top 10 worst prime ministers in the world, Yingluck rates a close second to her brother Thaksin who is rated first. Most of the comments on this English-language site highlight her simple-mindedness, heartlessness, or inability to lead the country:

> She is the most stupid prime minister. The worst is that she has not done anything to help the country since she became PM.

> Well.. How can I put this.. She can't even speak her native language properly. Do not mention about her English skill. I still wonder what does 'Thank you three time' mean and how can she graduate from the Univ. from USA.. She rarely play her role. Skipping meeting is her hobby and cry in front of public is her only one specialty.. She does make the woman's pride down. Just show her face and read the script is her job, I guess?

> People think Yingluck is stupid, but in fact, she is a brutal and cruel person from her command to kill people every night during the Bangkok Shutdown when they sleep on the road. These people do not have any weapon, but only whistle. Yingluck is Satan on earth. Thailand will be bankrupted soon if she continues to stay in Thailand . . . .

On this particular site, the public is encouraged to leave messages expressing their opinion of Yingluck and whether they agree or disagree with other commenters' viewpoints. Visitors to the site can vote either by ticking the thumbs-up image in support of the comment or thumbs-down to state their rejection of the claims. Some of the comments received an enormous number of supporters (anywhere from 3,000 to more than a million thumbs-up votes). Followers of the page are also able to share the website using Twitter or Facebook. The sharing and endorsement of people's opinions about Yingluck highlights the sense of freedom people felt to express their views candidly. The above comments clearly illustrate that the participants were not afraid to criticize and speak out against Yingluck. This type of peer endorsement of information and opinions can be understood as a means through which people develop their political identities and consciousness. This site offered an unconventional space for people to speak out against their leader without censorship. We suggest that it is reflective of an emerging political sphere of public agitation and discontent, providing an alternative space for citizens to share a collective and public display of dissatisfaction and protest.

While it is obvious from these comments that Yingluck was not a favored prime minister, there is also no doubt that her rise to power was set against a complex political backdrop. Controversy surrounded her government from the outset, with some protesters claiming she was simply a puppet for her brother and former prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, who (at the time of writing this article) faced corruption charges and was living in self-imposed exile in Dubai. In much of the commentary analyzed across the 100 sites, people accused her of acting as a political proxy for her brother:

> [Yingluck] just follows her brother order, Thaksin Shinawatra, to achieve authority, asset and etc. by corruption.

> She do everything what her brother said (Thaksin Shinawatra). She doesn't know what's right and wrong and totally can't think by herself.

> Bad like her brother go to hell.

These comments encapsulated the rising discontent toward Yingluck's leadership during the time she was in office. They indicate that people were undaunted by her power and felt defiant enough to express their views in a relatively public forum. The language is expressive, colorful, and often vitriolic and malicious. The comments reflect a public who were unconcerned about speaking their minds freely, and who would not hold back their anger, disappointment, frustration, and cynicism. We propose that such comments constitute a new form of political participation because

such views convey a political standpoint that has the potential to influence a wider audience through politically persuasive commentary. The comments colored the tone of the debate around Yingluck's leadership in ways in which debates between political leaders have not been able to accomplish among the general populace. Additionally, the further sharing and endorsing of these views, within the above mentioned sites and on other platforms, helped to raise political consciousness about the extent of public agitation. What was obvious on these sites was the number of participants endorsing such messages. The content of the messages might not have been assigned the same kind of attention or coverage in mainstream media outlets, and yet it was expressive of a public clearly prepared to engage in political dialogue. While the level of engagement through sharing and liking posts may not seem particularly surprising, in the context of a totalitarian state, speaking out against the ruling authority by endorsing and spreading opposing views online embodies an additional layer of citizen resistance that is a feature of digital life in Western democracies that is taken for granted.

Most of the sites in this study were extremely active during the 12-month period of analysis and tended to peak in activity during major protests that occurred in the physical setting of Bangkok's streets, which were also instances of greater media coverage (local, regional, and global). In fact, most of the sites studied were not only critical of Yingluck's leadership but also accused her of abusing her family connections. Similarly, during his term in office, Thaksin's opponents accused him of corruption and nepotism, while his government was charged with dictatorship, human rights abuses, and hostility toward free press. Yingluck's own rule was shrouded in political unrest and protests. As one social media user puts it:

> Her government implemented many destructive policies to the country, e.g. the rice policy, the highest corruptions in all gov projects, parliamentary dictatorship, denial of the Constitution.

Other citizens, who discussed Yingluck's policies, have either expressed their opinions about how she might make Thailand a better country for women or raised doubts about her capacity to do so.

> She might bring in more women's rights. A lot of women suffer domestic abuse and rape; I hope she can improve the situation. (Sukhpatra Chockmo, female)[3]

> She cannot be a representative of women's groups, because she has never expressed her vision and stance regarding the protection of women's interests. (Virada Somswadi, female, founder of the Women's Studies program, Chiang Mai University)[4]

These comments articulated perspectives that were quite critical of the government, but they also expressed a level of discontent about women's rights and position

3 See Branigan, 2011.

4 See Branigan, 2011.

in Thailand's social system. It is interesting that in this case one of the comments was by a Thai academic. This demonstrated how women were able to use social and digital media as an extension of their offline identities. The sites provided another space and avenue for women to share information, project their voices, and connect with a wider community they may not have had access to in the offline realm. In some cases, female members of protest groups were using blogs and the commenting features of popular sites to promote and generate public support for their causes, providing another example of how women were using social and digital media to extend their reach (SPH Razor, 2013).

These comments followed a larger pattern found on other social media sites, suggesting a general and mixed sense of both hopefulness and despair that Yingluck's leadership induced in Thai women. Those who supported her pledged their devotion, loyalty, and obligation toward her. Several women in leadership positions, like Thida Tawornseth, chairwoman of the Red Shirts, complimented Yingluck on her response to the flood crisis, which hit Thailand during her government:

> The government was not a one-man show, a team of principled people should help the leader make the right decisions. (Thida Tawornseth, female, Red Shirts chairwoman)[5]

However, further statements observing Yingluck's management of Thailand politics at the time suggested that she was being drowned out by other political voices. For instance, Chalidaporn Songsamphan, a professor of Gender Studies at Thammasat University, stated that Yingluck was midway between passing and failing her test in politics:

> Several issues pending since before the election remain undecided. She should be more independent and more forthcoming about her intentions, particularly in regard to solving the divisions in the country. It is impossible to identify any of her visions about the issues and other people tend to dominate political directions. (Chalidaporn Songsamphan, female, professor of Gender Studies, Thammasat University)[6]

The comments by academics, women's rights groups, and similar organizations with a social justice agenda played an important role in conveying alternative perspectives that may not necessarily have been picked up by the mainstream media. This point supports our contention that the spheres of online and offline politics are complementary to one another. According to Piela (2015), digital media can act as a facilitator of grassroots causes but can also provide an interpretative context for political acts themselves. In other words, people who represent various interest groups carry a key role in reading and interpreting the political landscape. They use social and digital media to show audiences the different angles through which the political

5 See SPH Razor, 2013.

6 See SPH Razor, 2013; see also Chalidaporn Songsamphan' personal blog at http://chalidaporn.blogspot.com.au/.

situation can be analyzed, and particularly how the existing political and social landscape contains implications for women.

A fresh outbreak of political violence continued in Thailand during November 2013, focused on removing the influence of Thaksin from Thai politics. Among other demands, the protests were triggered by a proposed amnesty bill, which would have pardoned political offences dating back to the 2006 coup, potentially quashing the corruption conviction of people who had been involved in political violence, including Thaksin Shinawatra.

Yingluck's 3-year term in office could be described as nothing short of contentious. In May 2014 and as the military coup ensued, Yingluck's government was swiftly turned over under claims that she abused her power to benefit her party and family. However, she continued to generate widespread support from both her direct fan base and other segments of Thai society, many of whom were captured on video pledging their commitment to and admiration for her (AP Archive, 2015). Other people directly endorsed Yingluck's Facebook page, which remained very active at that time with thousands of her followers pledging their support, while her profile in the political realm remained controversial. She faced further charges under Thailand's *National Anti-Corruption Commission* for allegedly mishandling a loss-making subsidy scheme for rice farmers. This multi-billion dollar scheme was popular in Thailand's rural rice-farming provinces in the North and Northeast, and helped Yingluck win the votes of millions of farmers when she came to power in 2011. Reports of corruption, negligence, and mismanagement plunged the policy into strife and forced the government to find measures to stem ballooning losses estimated at USD 6 billion. Despite her exile from government, these issues continued to garner widespread attention across a range of social and digital media platforms. This active online environment laid bare the participation of dispersed and divided female publics whose political perspectives were both shared and contested.

REDEFINING PARTICIPATION THROUGH WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

How are we to view this participatory behavior in a contemporary context, given that women in Thailand are generally excluded from participating in political dialogue, and are cut off from voicing their concerns in traditional media spaces, such as television news reports, radio, and print publications? Social media and other online channels provide an alternative medium for women to voice such concerns directly, whilst remaining anonymous if they choose to and without the need to justify themselves. We have shown how this digital environment nurtured an expressive space that welcomed and included different viewpoints about the social and political issues of the day. While it is harder to ascertain whether these same women, presenting their viewpoints online, were the ones who took to the streets to protest, what is pertinent here is that the digital space provided a connection to an alternative form of engagement with political life. No matter how arbitrary or tentative this connection and engagement is, what we are presented with here is a sphere of influence, with members of the public clearly expressing their shared or oppositional views, reinforcing their own and endorsing those of others. The women who posted a comment and those who responded were not always necessarily articulate, clear about their

political intentions, or politically correct in their use of language – yet what could be observed was a sense of freedom and directness in their views. This was evidence of a cogent and compelling political debate circulating in the everyday lives of women in Thailand.

This is a noteworthy context given that women's participation in politics is often viewed as a reduced space of political activity. Some writers have discussed this space as hostile or one that affords few entitlements. The suggestion is that women are largely excluded from participating in formal political arenas. As Harris (2008) contends, "young women are underrepresented in many conventional forms of political practice . . . and are less entitled to participate in formal political activities" (p. 487). Yet, Harris (2004, 2006) along with others has shown how female participants have utilized digital technologies in new and experimental ways (Haraway, 1985; Keller, 2012; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007; Offen, 1988; Tarrow, 1989).[7] Such uses suggest a new kind of politics is being performed online, but the relationships and disparities between these kinds of informal and formal politics are still being realized.

This observation about women's political agency has continued to lend understanding to emerging conceptualizations of participation. Piela (2015) writes of the gendered uses of technology for Muslim women and those who identify as activists. She argues that the Internet provides a platform for the development of gendered interpretations of Islamic scriptures and that these alternative readings challenge patriarchal conventions. Piela views the Internet as a 'facilitator' of women's collaborative and interpretative practices, both online and in connection with their face-to-face grassroots activities. Online spaces, she believes, are valuable for Muslim women because grassroots women are largely excluded from any decision-making in Islamic religious structures (Piela, 2015, p. 274).

This idea strikes a chord with other researchers who concur that the digital enacts inclusivity. Newsom and Lengel's (2012) analysis of Arab feminist activism during the protests in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 illustrates how women used social and digital media to construct and broadcast their own voices and experiences. However, while digital acts formed an inclusive and shared space for women to express their views, there were certain limits to their voices. Although the online "third space" offered Arab women a space for activism, it was essentially a "space of contained empowerment'" (Newsom & Lengel, 2012, p. 32). In other words, women were able to participate in the political dialogue, but their messages had only a limited power since they could be reframed and watered down once the mainstream media remediates them as news stories for wider public consumption.

Despite these limitations, a number of scholars assert that the social networking capacity of social and digital media cannot be underestimated. Women are willing

7 Feminist activists typically engage with social and digital media to create "unregulated, public spaces for peer communities and to construct public selves" (Harris, 2004, p. 492). Both the Red Shirt and Yellow Shirt Facebook pages represent public spaces for activists and supporters to engage with each other and establish online communities. The Red Shirt Facebook page has a reach of over 20,000 Facebook users and the Yellow Shirt Facebook page has over 4,000 likes. Many of the posts are shared, which indicates messages reach further than explicitly stated. The page also incorporates posts by participants and individual members, showing their support by posting their own messages about the cause. The sharing of posts and the contribution of posts helps increase the scale and reach of the groups' social media presence, effectively increasing awareness about their cause.

to risk political retribution because their ability to discuss political issues with other citizens creates a sense of belonging. Touria Khannous (2011, p. 359) argues that while Facebook and blogs allow women a space to speak freely and initiate social change, the international response to their social media use has taken on an arguably higher importance than the blogs themselves. Social networking tools have allowed Muslim women to develop their own direct and uncensored messages and help position the women and their political agendas directly on the global stage. Arab feminism, Khannous (2011) contends, has had a socially transformative impact on women's lives because of the unprecedented number of Muslim networks that have developed and flourished in the light of social and digital media. Khannous emphasizes how virtual spaces provide a liberating medium for Muslim women to express themselves as they endure restraints imposed on them by their respective government. Online forums enable Moroccan and Saudi feminists to discuss issues of femininity, raise religious questions, and learn about cultural differences, despite the risks they face offline.

The development of research, which is located outside the Western feminist context or that focuses on gendered forms of technology use, reveals the growing interest in how women of color, minorities, or women who are socially, politically, or religiously marginalized are increasingly finding alternative avenues to form social networks and influence formal politics. Looking at this research, we have sought to highlight the largely deficient body of research on women's political participation in Thailand, and to explore the implications of participation scholarship for Thai women's political experiences. Women's voices and viewpoints in Thailand have remained silenced in most traditional media, yet Thai women have used a range of social and digital media to discuss their political standpoints, publicly sharing and exchanging their political perspectives during the protests. These digital environments were unregulated, largely open networks, and involved no or little moderation by system administrators. Users could therefore create content dynamically and establish a flow of direct and pervasive communication with a broad, diverse, and unknown public.

By incorporating these Thai women's perspectives, we argue for new modes of conceiving women's engagement in politics in ways that move beyond conventional descriptions of political participation. The women's online discussions constituted a form of 'action' and engagement that might not traditionally be understood as a conventional political stance in prevailing definitions of participatory politics. These sites offered an unconventional space of political discourse that not only reflected Thai women's political perspectives, but also their capacity to debate political issues and share these perspectives with other like-minded women experiencing similar conditions. These online forms were unconventional in terms of how they were defined as distinct sites that enable alternative expressions of political identities and perspectives. They are also unconventional insofar as they deviate from traditional offline or face-to-face political environments where women are unwelcome or excluded from participating in political processes. Our use of Thailand as a case study suggests that these unconventional forms of participation have a further bearing on how citizens spread their political messages, and connect with others concerning their everyday anxieties. These participatory forms are indicative of a public in which women's voices, images, and collective experiences can be examined outside the established parameters of conventional politics.

CONCLUSION

The politics of participation is a lively terrain. Although much attention has been placed on the role of social and digital media in mass events across the Arab world, parts of Europe, and the USA, their role and impact in Southeast Asian contexts have been largely neglected. This article sought to highlight how the rise of social and digital media has altered what it means to participate politically. By calling attention to Thai women's engagement in a specific political context, our aim was to illustrate how a range of different online platforms were being utilized for participatory politics. We focused on participants' online interaction and commentary to legitimize Thai women's political engagement. This approach not only conveyed the extent to which digital media platforms were being used for political engagement, but also assisted us to critically investigate the nature of online participation in Thailand. We found that social and digital media users were not afraid to speak out about their discontent with the government during Bangkok's 2013/2014 protests. These participants appeared to have no fear of reprisal or retribution. Furthermore, there existed an active practice of sharing and endorsing people's opinions; the sheer volume of this sharing, liking, endorsing, and commenting was clearly visible in terms of numbers. Furthermore, many sites also included the participant's name, profile, and affiliation.

These practices encourage us to revise current definitions of political participation by accounting for the new constituents of participatory activities beyond conventional politics. The range of women's comments across the Internet and social media sites was indicative of the complex political discussions taking place within online groups and communities. The commentary expressed a range of attitudes, which were supported, shared, and contested. The participation and comments by academics and women's organizations illustrate how digital media were used as an extension to offline activities, protests, and political agendas. These commenters fueled, supported, and reinforced the opinions of other participants across a range of social media sites. Commentary merged with other perspectives and became part of a larger whole, making it difficult to ascertain the original source of debates and breaking the rules that define engagement along traditional thresholds.

The speed, scale, and nature of Internet-based discussion sites create an efficient manner for women's organizations to communicate, push their agenda, and influence public opinions and activities. While there are challenges in tracing the relationship between online and offline activities, what we have shown is that traditional face-to-face political modes of engagement have been complicated by digital environments, particularly as they interact with the changing media ecologies of the 21st century. Social and digital media draw attention to alternative spaces for discussing the issues of social concern and reflect the multiple ways in which women engage in politics in non-traditional ways. This understanding is important because women in Thailand may not necessarily engage or have opportunities to directly participate in conventional politics. Some may have no interest in following conventional politics, yet may be quite outspoken when it comes to conversing with others about their political stance, be it with work colleagues, friends, or family, or as in this case with an unknown public. A closer examination of these sites has allowed us to trace the range of perspectives commenters from Thailand had about Yingluck's politics and

the political climate for women's participation during her regency. Such ruminations reconfigure the conceptual frame for understanding who participants are, how they participate, and what this may imply in the context of women's political situation and experiences in Southeast Asia. Analysis of such experiences carry political consequences for engaging with media ecologies in flux, and for understanding the ongoing history of women's political oppression and resistance across Asia.

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Forming 'Forbidden' Identities Online: Atheism in Indonesia

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This article discusses the online activism of Indonesian atheists. While most of the little existent scholarship on atheism in Indonesia views the controversial cases in the light of the violation of Western-style rights to free speech and religious liberty, a closer look at the public discourses both online and offline reveals a more complex picture. The article embeds atheist activism and the well-known case of Alexander An in the changing landscape of religion and state in post-Suharto Indonesia. It points at the intricate relationship between atheism and blasphemy and shows how activists not only carve a space for themselves online, but also seek to counter the negative and anti-religious image that decades-long campaigning has created for atheists. Activists use Facebook, Twitter, messaging systems, and forums such as Quora, both to become visible and yet allow for anonymity. Their online communication and activism is often coupled with offline meetings. In this way, atheists allow for a thriving 'community', and also present atheism positively in public. However, to defend atheism this way also has its downsides, as it aligns Indonesian atheists with an international network of mainly Western-funded human rights activists and thus runs the risk of further alienating them from a nation that strongly defines itself along religious identity.

Keywords: Atheism; Indonesia; Islam; Non-Religious Minorities; Social Media

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INTRODUCTION

When self-described Indonesian atheists meet in public places, more commonly than not they have already met online. In a space that allows for the use of pseudonyms, hundreds of skeptics find like-minded doubters and non-believers in a society where religiosity is the norm. Across the archipelago, these atheists regularly organize offline meetings. Some just want to watch a movie or share a meal with fellow non-believers, while others want to discuss the difficulties of having to pretend to be religious for their families and colleagues, or to partake in religious rituals for fear of reprisals. All of them are aware of the stakes involved in framing their activities as 'atheism', especially since 2012, when Alexander An, a civil servant in the Dharmasraya regency of West Sumatra, was first attacked and then imprisoned by local authorities for his Facebook posts against Islam. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International called for his unconditional release, while Muslim hardline organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI) demanded his execution. Finally, the local judges at the Muaro Sijunjung district court found him guilty of disseminating hatred and sentenced him to two and a half years of prison (Hu-

man Rights Watch, 2013). For many human rights activists, this case is a proof that atheism is being officially prohibited in Indonesia. Yet, atheism is only one of several '-isms' that have been discussed controversially in the post-Suharto era. After verbal and semi-legal attacks against "*sekularisme, pluralisme dan liberalisme*" ("secularism, pluralism, and liberalism") in the mid-2000s (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2005; Gillespie, 2007), and the rejection of an appeal to revoke the so-called blasphemy law in 2010, the so called Aan case (Aan being Alexander An's nickname) sparked a heated debate on *ateisme*, and on the state's regulation of religion and irreligion. Like *sekularisme, pluralisme,* and *liberalisme, ateisme* is a controversial term, and most Indonesians would frown at someone's declaration of being an atheist.[1]

The term seems to carry a certain dose of hostility against religion, and thus people's understandings for moral conduct. Human rights activists and foreign as well as local scholars interpret the case as a straightforward example of growing intolerance and the shrinking space for expressing non-religious views in Indonesia (Hasani, 2016). However, there is more to the case than the question of freedom of expression. In this paper, I examine the case of Alexander An from a discourse-oriented perspective. I argue that this case served as a discursive battleground for reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and religion. Nationalists, liberals, and promoters of varying nuances of the political involvement of religion have been rethinking the position of Islam vis-à-vis the state with new fervor since the fall of Suharto in 1998. In these discourses, a new voice is slowly beginning to rise and enter public discourses via online platforms: A number of Indonesian atheist activists today are striving to carve out a legitimate presence for atheist identities. Yet, after decades of demonization as 'communists' since 1965/1966, during which religiosity became an expression of being anti-communist (Bertrand, 2004, p. 74), this form of social activism is still highly controversial.

Adopting critical discourse analysis, this article focuses on the case of Alexander An because of its dialectical relationship with the social structures and institutions which frame it. In other words, "the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them" (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997, p. 258). This article thus eschews any detailed discussion of the history or contemporary practices and intellectual discussions related to atheism, but rather seeks to situate the case of Alexander An in the public discourse on religious minorities and on the changing relationship between religion and the state. It analyzes how this case became so widely discussed, and how it changed the discourse on Islam and the state. The case of Alexander An is a critical point of entry for broader questions on non-belief and online activism in Indonesia that have been widely discussed by local and international media and human rights reports, but that have not yet been the focus of scholarly research. Critical questions with this regard are: What did Aan's opponents and the state find so offensive about his comments, and how does this case relate to atheism and the online presence of non-belief in Indonesia more generally. To answer these questions, this article unpacks the circumstances under which Aan's case became an offence to the state. The main method employed is media analysis, complemented by online and offline con-

1 I observed this during my fieldwork on notions of orthodoxy and deviance in Indonesia. Between 2008 and 2014, I spent several periods of altogether 18 months in various cities and towns across Java.

versations and interviews during and after my fieldwork in Java between 2009 and 2013 when I was working on deviant sects, or *aliran sesat*. The Aan case opens a window to a small but well-connected group of activists who use the Internet to push the boundaries of the sayable and tolerable. Given the aggressive climate that works against the public propagation of atheism in Indonesia today, as indicated by the case itself, online forums and chat groups are the only promising space that allows for atheist expressions – a space where a concerned group of atheists strives to educate an Internet-savvy public about their lives and non-religious views. What they insist on is the possibility of non-belief without insulting religion, which I will illustrate in some examples below. The case of Alexander An and the online presence of other atheist activists form an ideal site to study the boundaries of what is publicly tolerable and to investigate under what conditions these boundaries become contested.

THE AAN CASE AND ATHEISM IN INDONESIA

More generally speaking, scholarship on irreligion differentiates between atheists and people without any religious affiliation. Atheism usually refers to not believing in the existence of one or several gods, and non-religion refers to either those without beliefs or those whose beliefs are not recognized as religious. Some of the academic literature on this subject (e.g., Beaman & Tomlins, 2014; Lee, 2015) points at the broad palette of nuances, ranging from non-theist religious practice to irreligious beliefs, which often gets overshadowed by the crooked binary of atheism versus religion. In Indonesia, however, the state's foundational political principles of Pancasila prescribe to its people monotheism, since religion or *agama* is per se defined as the belief in one god only. In this context, even Hinduism is constructed as a monotheistic religion (McDaniel, 2013). Besides the six officially recognized religions, the Indonesian Constitution also recognizes *kepercayaan*, literally belief, to refer to local beliefs which are not referred to as atheism, and are not part of the discourse on atheism. Thus, while they may not necessarily be similar elsewhere, in the context of Indonesia, atheism and non-belief mean one and the same thing. In addition to the more general differentiation between atheism and non-belief, a growing scholarly work focuses on different kinds of atheism such as, for example, *negative* atheism, which is defined as the not-believing in the existence of a god, or *positive* atheism, or the believing that there is no god (Martin, 2007). These categorizations, however, are mainly based on Western experiences (which self-evidently is not to say that non-Western experiences of irreligiosity and non-belief do not exist; they just have not informed the currently globally salient category of atheism). In many societies where religion and state are more formally connected and constitute the social norm, atheists are too concerned about even voicing their skepticism to refine their disbelief. The atheists that this article focuses on demonstrate a newly forming identity in Indonesian society today. After decades of worrying about being associated with communism – still a deeply stigmatized category, even 60 years after the mass-killings in the transition period leading to the New Order – a loose network of activists is attempting to rehabilitate the term *ateis*. They claim not only the right to not believe in the existence of God, but also the right to express this skepticism or disbelief in public. Many of them remain anonymous online, but their nicknames and their frequent use of English suggest a

cosmopolitan upbringing or outlook: Some, yet not all of the activists, belong to the Indonesian diaspora. A more detailed look at the case reveals that Alexander An was not simply imprisoned for being an atheist, or even for creating an online platform for atheists – almost 1000 Facebook users supported ('liked') his Facebook fan page entitled Ateis Minang. Aan went much further than publicly announcing his disbelief and inviting others to discuss it with him. In January 2012, one of his posts read: "If God exists, why do bad things happen? . . . There should only be good things if God is merciful". He then declared heaven, hell, angels, and devils to be myths (*mitos*) and posted an article describing Muhammad as "attracted to his daughter-in-law" as well as comic strips depicting him and a servant during sexual intercourse (Bachyul, 2012; McKinnon, 2012). These posts go beyond mere statements of atheism. They combine an atheist stance with anti-Islamic commentary. Shortly after these posts, on his way to work, Aan was violently attacked. Rather than arresting the perpetrators, the police took Aan into protective custody. He was later charged with religious blasphemy, atheism propagation, and dissemination of religious hostility. Prosecutors sought a three-and-a-half-year jail term for him. In June 2012, the court eventually convicted him of the most serious charge and decided to drop the other two. The judge found Aan guilty of having violated Article 28 of the Information and Electronic Transaction Law, more precisely of "disseminating information aimed at inciting religious hatred or hostility" (Amnesty International, 2012). For this, the court sentenced Aan to two and a half years of imprisonment and a fine of IDR 100 million.

Public commentary on the case reflects the broadness of the spectrum of responses to avowals of atheism in Indonesia. On the respective Facebook page alone, comments ranged from calls for beheading Aan to vocal support of his cause. Several national as well as international human rights groups called for his release; Amnesty International, for example, filed him under its category "prisoner of conscience" (Abbott, 2014). At the other end of the spectrum, the Islamic Society Forum (*Forum Umat Islam*, FUI) insisted that a five-year jail term for Aan would not suffice: "He deserves the death penalty, even if he decides to repent. What he has done cannot be tolerated. It is important to prevent this group from spreading atheism in this country", said the organization's Secretary General Muhammad al-Khaththath ("Calls to Behead", 2012). It cannot fully be determined whether their hatred was sparked by Aan's declared disbelief, or by the insults he had posted. Human rights reports and a number of newspaper articles simply claimed that Aan was sentenced for his atheism. But atheism itself, albeit uncommon and shunned, is not illegal in Indonesia. It was not his non-belief that Aan was punished for, Aan was punished for making his atheism public in a particular way. It appears that it was the public display of non-belief and anti-religious views that crossed the border of what is acceptable. Among the 240 million Indonesians classified as Muslim, Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, or Confucian, there are many who do not believe in any god. Among those, many joke about or question religious beliefs in small groups. But the difference between these atheists and atheist activists such as Aan, is that the latter claim their right to speak publicly about their views – they claim their share of public space. Aan strengthened this visibility by using his real name. Thus, he was targeted for spreading (*menyebar*) atheist beliefs. Many atheist activists would argue that they do not wish to convert believers to atheism, but that they simply want to be accepted in their non-religious

identity. But the line between acceptance and missionary intentions is blurred: Greater acceptance and visibility of a belief or conviction, circulating details concerning practices, and the possibility of discussion all have the potential to lure those out of the closet[2] who have hitherto been in hiding. In Indonesia, the accusation of proselytization weighs heavy. Ever since the first European encounters, and especially since the days of anti-colonial struggle, many Muslims have been worried about foreigners spreading Christianity, or Christianization (*kristenisasi*) (Boland, 1971, p. 230; Steenbrink, 1998, pp. 329-330). In the post-independence period, fear of conflict through proselytization was so widespread that it was legally prohibited (Steenbrink, 1998, p. 330). Until today, the Proselytizing Guidelines (Ministerial Decision No. 77/1978) and the Guidelines for Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia (Ministerial Decision No. 20/1978) regulate and restrict the dissemination of religious convictions. Viewed in this light, it is not surprising that many Indonesians keep a close and skeptical eye on the public visibility of atheists.

Two main factors seem to have contributed to the sentence against Alexander An. First, what many presented as a case of atheism came in combination with what was perceived as a deliberate insult of Islam. In fact, the case could be analytically reduced to blasphemy if one were to ignore the discursive event surrounding it, which presented the categories of atheism and insult as deeply enmeshed. Second, the outrage this case sparked among different circles positioned it on a public stage. Arjun Appadurai's (2006) work on inter-ethnic conflict helps to understand why even 'small numbers' are often, as in this case, perceived as a major threat to national majorities. Nationalism, he argues – and this applies to many interpretations of religion as well – is ultimately built on notions of exceptionalism, namely the belief that a national ethnic or a particular religious group is unique and ultimately different to, if not better than others. This uniqueness is based on narratives of certain shared characteristics, and minorities challenge such narratives of social cohesion and homogeneity. In Indonesia, the dominant narrative is that of religious *harmoni*. Aan's statements can thus be viewed as a visible impurity. The visibility of non-belief coupled with anti-Islamic sentiments thus challenges the narrative of both *ummat Indonesia* and a multi-religious but monotheistic and harmonious Indonesian society.

The major challenging factor of the Aan case is not so much atheism or even the blasphemous insult per se, but rather the spreading or, in the words of the court's sentencing, "the disseminating of information" (Mahkamah Agung Republik Indonesia, 2012). It is not so much the contents of Aan's message, but the quality and eventually the produce of their dissemination. During the sentencing, the presiding judge Eka Prasetya Budi Dharma described Aan's actions as having caused "anxiety to the community and tarnished Islam" ("*keresahan dalam masyarakat dan menodai Islam*") (Mahkamah Agung Republik Indonesia, 2012). This judgement was linked to the le-

2 Activists speak of "being in the closet" and "coming out", either in English or in direct translation, as in *keluar dari kloset/kakus*. "Closeted" and "in the closet" is a central metaphor of the 20th century LGBTQ movement. It describes people who have not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity, and who hide a part of their personality because of social pressure (Sedgwick, 1990; Seidman, Meeks, & Traschen, 1999). Those who use this metaphor to refer to atheists argue that most atheists hide their critical stance toward religion in order to remain safe, or simply in order to avoid harassment, and that they suffer from having to hide part of their identity.

gal upholding of the so-called blasphemy law in 2010: After a group of activists had demanded its revocation, the judges explicitly declared that Indonesia is a country with belief in God, not an atheist country, and that campaigning for the freedom not to have a religion was neither provided for, nor possible in Indonesia (Crouch, 2012; Menchik, 2016; Schäfer, 2013). In both cases, the judges were careful to reach a compromise between extreme demands. The second aspect this case reveals is that there is a liberal public in Indonesia that demands not only the right to publicly express its non-belief, but also, inextricably, the right to blaspheme. While many atheist activists work hard to maintain a respectful and positive relationship with believers, others conclude that they can only fully exercise their right to free speech if there is no exception for religious sentiments. One might argue that their situation in Indonesia forces non-believers and those deemed deviant to demand the right to blaspheme, since any atheist statement is prone to be punished under Indonesia's blasphemy laws. Blasphemy and atheism are thus deeply enmeshed. Atheist activists cannot escape this matter, and they use it to push forward their demand to the right to speak their mind freely: No atheist activist can seriously campaign for his or her right to speak freely on the basis of their non-religious identity without also demanding a public space for blasphemy. Outspoken atheists are not only different from most Indonesians. For those who fear religious insult, they are the 'blasphemous other'. It is this particular connection between atheism and blasphemy together with its public delivery that caused the case of Alexander An to explode.[3]

INDONESIA'S BLASPHEMY LAWS AND ONLINE MEDIA

In 1961, President Sukarno accepted the selection of six religions as suggested by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Based on the four criteria of having a holy scripture, a prophet, one lordship, and a system of rules for its followers, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism became officially and legally recognized religions in the young Republic of Indonesia.[4] Arising from the effort to satisfy the faction that demanded an official place for Islam in the formation of the independent state without excluding the adherents of other religions, the fifth principle of the official state ideology Pancasila prescribed the belief in "One Lordship" or "*Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*" (Darmaputera, 1988, pp. 84, 153).[5] But despite these regulations, the formal adherence to a religion is not prescribed constitutionally.[6]

Indonesian atheists today face difficulties on two legal levels: the level of registration of religious affiliation, and the level of banned blasphemy. The Indonesian national identity card requires filling in a religious affiliation. Although it is legally

3 Elsewhere, I have concluded that the combination of visibility, foreignness (real or ascribed), and growing numbers of followers (real or reported) are highly likely to make a group a target (Schäfer, 2015).

4 After being banned at various times, Confucianism has again been officially recognized as a religion since 2006.

5 *Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa* has been translated in various ways, but the choice of words, which Eka Darmaputera convincingly argues can only be correctly translated as "One Lordship" (Darmaputera, 1988, pp. 84, 153), suggests that it was intended to prescribe monotheism.

6 For a more detailed discussion of the constitutional situation of atheists, see Hasani (2016, pp. 201-205).

possible to register as not adhering to any religion by filling in "not existent" ("*tidak ada*") in the blank space provided for the category of religion, very few actually make use of this option. Many bureaucrats refuse to oblige, and the danger of being discriminated when registering at school, at university, or at work is considerable. Many atheists say they fear repercussions when they are known to be non-believers.[7] Even greater is the legal difficulty in the case of marriage. Indonesian law has no provision for non-religious civil marriages. According to the marriage law of 1974, every marriage needs to undergo a religious ceremony led by an officially recognized religious leader in order to be recognized as a legal marriage by the state. The other set of laws that atheists may face difficulties with are the anti-blasphemy laws. Religious blasphemy is prohibited in Indonesia under Law No. 1/PNPS/1965. Within the Penal Code, blasphemy is prohibited under Article 156a. Paragraph (a) of this article employs a vague language in its prohibition of any acts and expressions of views which are considered to be blasphemous, and carries a maximum punishment of five years imprisonment. A similar maximum punishment is also carried by paragraph (b) of the same article, which prohibits any acts and expressions of views calling for others to embrace atheism. Further, Article 28 of the 2008 Information and Electronic Transaction Law makes the dissemination of information aimed at inflicting hatred based on ethnicity and religion punishable. Both laws are often used against individuals who are considered deviants within their own religions, or who are accused of insulting a particular religion, for instance by mocking religious practices or prophets. Yet, only the latter is the one applied in the case of Alexander An. This move undoubtedly aimed at encouraging self-censorship and robbed Indonesians of the illusion that the Internet is an unregulated space.

In 2015, Freedom House ranked Indonesia as "Partly Free", with a score of 42 (midway between 0 as best and 100 as worst) (Freedom House, 2015). In Indonesia, this type of freedom – the kind that is bound to the Western notion of freedom of speech – is more easily obtained on the Internet than in print media, on TV, or on the radio (Lim, 2012). This is at least partly due to the inconsistency of Indonesia's Internet regulations, and because digital spheres allow for the use of pseudonyms. While pseudonyms and second accounts could technically be traced back, the offence at stake here is not the type that aggravates a tightly controlling state – such as in the case of Thailand, or China – but rather sits unevenly with members of the public. Those who oppose atheists or religious and political diversity do not have the sophisticated means that would be necessary to trace Internet users. Their technical limits mean more online freedom for those who wish to make their ideas visible, but not themselves. Alexander An decided to not make use of a pseudonym, but openly revealed his identity. This may have prompted the physical attack on him and, shortly after, his imprisonment. Yet, many Indonesians seem to have learned from his experience, as they make ample use of the anonymity that the Internet still offers today. Indonesia's media landscape is vibrant and open, with few certainties and sometimes surprising restrictions. Before 1998, media was highly supervised both by the Ministry of Information and through mechanisms of self-censorship (Hill, 1994). Issues

7 Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann (2006) have shown a high likeliness of being discriminated also for US-American non-believers despite increasing acceptance of religious diversity in the states.

that were not to be openly discussed included *suku* (ethnicity or tribal affiliation), *agama* (religion), *ras* (race), and *antar golongan* (groups with different affiliations and background), also known under the acronym SARA.

Journalists were expected to avoid these topics and to take positions stressing national unity. Since then, freedom of expression has increased considerably and the Indonesian media are now considered among the freest in Asia. However, restrictions and regulations remain. International observers from Reporters Without Borders ranked the country 132nd out of 180 countries in their 2014 World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2014). Indonesia ranks that low, not so much because of media censorship or government control, but mainly because of the murders of several journalists which were never properly resolved or prosecuted. Issues such as corruption or Papua's struggle for greater autonomy are among those topics that are still particularly dangerous to discuss in public. Besides legal regulations and violence against journalists, ownership is an important factor that affects Indonesia's media landscape. Despite fairly diverse media ownership patterns, business networks rapidly gain influence vis-à-vis the state (Hill & Sen, 2012). Today, in Indonesia, more than 55 million people use the Internet regularly to access various websites – including the websites of local and national newspapers – with almost half of them surfing the web via mobile devices. Mobile phones are an important status symbol in Indonesia (Pousttchi & Wiedemann, 2009, p. 148). The country boasts the world's second largest number of Facebook users and the third largest number of Twitter users (Indonesia Investments, 2014). The majority of young Indonesians have grown up in a very mobile, fast-moving society in which mobile phones have been one of the easiest ways to stay in touch with family and friends back in the left-behind hometown. The digital divide disadvantages rural areas and ensures faster, more regular, and more reliable access to the Internet to urban Indonesians. Among these urbanites are those who have grown up with a cosmopolitan outlook on individuals and society. Many of them compare practices at home with those they find on TV and online, and situate themselves in a broader frame of reference than the village, the city, or even the nation state. Their global outlook becomes apparent in their consumption of both international as well as national English-language media; their frequent use of English in discussion boards; and either their applications for studies abroad, or their fondness of movies whose main characters often live torn between their loved ones back in Indonesia and their studies abroad. Among these cosmopolitan urbanites are those who actively seek to broaden the spectrum of acceptable identities in Indonesian public discourse.

ONLINE ATHEIST ACTIVISM AS A CLAIM TO PUBLIC SPACE

Online activism for atheism forms maybe the most important frontline in the broad campaign for the right to freely express skepticism toward religion. Atheist groups have systematically and regularly maintained online groups, discussion threads, and websites in order to make their views public to an Internet-savvy audience. The activist group Indonesian Atheists, founded in 2008, has its own blog decorated with its own logo; it also maintains the most popular Facebook group and is active on YouTube and Twitter. Its founder is Karl Karnadi, an Indonesian expat in Germany and

the US. Eight years after its founding, it reached 1700 members (who call themselves Indonesian Atheists).[8] Another group is the Indonesian Atheist Community, with about 500 likes on their Facebook fan page.[9] Many sign into the group with their real names, while others establish a second account with a pseudonym to protect their identity, either for safety reasons or for fear of alienating their families. Some share stories of being disowned by their parents, and so there is not a general encouragement of 'coming out' as an atheist. Another popular group on Facebook, Indonesian Atheist Parents, is dedicated to questions of atheist parenting. This is a closed group with about 400 members.[10] Atheists with children discuss questions of religious education and of raising children without faith in a society in which religiosity is the norm. These groups mainly function as forums for atheists and non-believers to exchange their experiences.

In addition to these online forums, atheist groups organize regular offline meetings. These often have less of an activist character, but are gatherings for dinner or movie-watching, offering an opportunity to "[have] fun with fellow nonbelievers, where they can be themselves for a while and not [have] to pretend (to be religious or someone they're not)" (Karl Karnadi, 7 February 2016). From these general offline meetings, smaller activist groups emerge and continue their communication online via instant messaging systems such as WhatsApp and LINE. The constant threat of physical violence is one of the reasons why atheist campaigning continues to thrive online. Another related reason is that atheists often become outspoken only after they have left Indonesia to live abroad. Members of the Indonesian diaspora support atheist activism in the motherland by publicly showing their face and name without the same fear of attacks that they would suffer in Indonesia.[11]

Besides serving as meeting platforms, online groups and websites also provide a space for atheism in a semi-public realm. Atheists gather online not only to exchange experiences and opinions but also to educate an Internet-savvy public about their own perspectives. This becomes clear in the online forum *Anda Bertanya Ateis Menjawab* (You Ask, Atheists Respond). The group is also active on Facebook and Twitter. Here, a group of activists "positively interact[s] with the public through [a] strongly moderated Q&A format" to "soften the devilish image of atheists" in the Indonesian public (Karl Karnadi, 7 February 2016). On their Facebook page, liked by more than 55.000 users[12] , they share information on atheism, but also regularly post greetings on major religious holidays such as Muslims' Eid, Christians' Christmas, or Chinese Happy Lunar New Year. After decades of demonization, this online outreach and the

8 While some members will only join the group to inform themselves over its activities, it is safe to conclude that the number of its members does correlate with the significance of the group. For more information, see Indonesian Atheists' Facebook fan page at https://www.facebook.com/groups/indonesianatheists/?fref=ts.

9 In October 2016, the site had 496 likes.

10 In October 2016, the group had 400 members.

11 This is not to say that activism is restricted to diaspora Indonesians; it is just easier for them to use their real names. From the comments on the respective websites, it is clear that many participants in the online discussions are based in Indonesian cities. Users have hitherto organized offline meetings in at least nine cities, including Jakarta, Bandung, Jogjakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, and Malang in Java, Medan in Aceh, and various places in Bali. Indonesians abroad organize their own meetings.

12 This number refers to October 2016.

notion of community that these websites and forums create in tandem with regular offline meetings seem to help soften social schisms, and even indicate efforts to differentiate between different facets of non-belief.

This mixture of online and offline engagement is reminiscent of gay parades, where the mass character of the event together with practices of donning masks and costumes allowed homosexuals to gather and spend time together, and to simultaneously be present and visible in the public space without exposing themselves to the same vulnerability that they would risk in daily life. In other words, online forums, groups, and websites have a double function: Firstly, they offer atheists a space to seek advice and exchange opinions and strategies; secondly, and more importantly, they make visible their claim to the right to exist as non-believers. Atheist activists use the Internet as a semi-public space that allows them to be simultaneously visible and anonymous. Online activism gives atheists a share of the public realm and allows their cause to be visible and present.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ACTIVISTS

The skepticism toward atheism stems from its supposedly direct link to communism reflected, for example, in the reactions to the 1949 novel *Ateis* by Achdiat Karta Mihardja, in which the lead character, a Muslim called Hasan, begins to question his faith after conversations with his Marxist-Leninist friends. Several comments uttered by politicians in the years to follow show how atheism was ideologically constructed as connected to communism (Hasani, 2016, p. 199). Today, much of the skepticism toward atheism is framed in and enhanced by its international dimension, particularly in connection to Western societies and governments. In addition to the attention which Western media cast upon the issue, and which some Indonesians are well aware of, recognition from abroad comes in two forms: Via the language of human rights and via the international support from other atheist organizations. Both entail not only moral, but also financial support, particularly in the legal realm. Locally, many look at these connections skeptically, and accuse local NGOs of being subverted agents of foreign interests. Notwithstanding, many atheists debate their existence in the vocabulary of human rights. Indeed, the language of human rights has become omnipresent in Indonesia since 1998. The *reformasi* period brought a mushrooming of civil society organizations, and many of them rely entirely on foreign support from USAID, AusAID, and so forth. Those organizations not only speak the language of human rights themselves, but also disseminate this language into Indonesian society through their public outreach in newspapers and other media, and through the jargon of applications. Salaries from international agencies are often not only competitive but generous, and many educated Indonesians regularly try to get their activism funded by an international agency. An important aspect of the human rights regime is the increased importance of the concept of minority since the early 1990s.[13] In their 2013 report on "Abuses Against Religious Minorities", Human Rights Watch discusses the case of Alexander An at length, thereby suggesting that atheists are a reli-

13 Two minority agendas are reflected in the "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities", adopted by the UN in 1992, and the "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", adopted in 2007.

gious minority in need of protection (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Atheist organizations in Indonesia not only speak the language of human rights, but focus on the right to non-belief. For them, agnosticism, humanism, or atheism, are group identities that deserve state protection. They advocate for those they perceive as part of their group. In the case of Alexander An, the American Humanist Association – a US-American organization that provides legal assistance to defend the rights of non-religious and religious minorities and actively lobbies for the separation between church and the state in the United States and abroad – discussed his case and offered to assist him with legal support (Bulger, n.d.). This foreign recognition further strengthens atheism as an identity category. As a comment by Karl Karnadi on the online platform Quora illustrates:

> When international organizations like Human Rights Watch mentioned atheists as one of Indonesian minority groups for the first time in . . . [sic] probably ever, it has brought confidence to many Indonesian atheists. I saw some atheists were starting to come out, even though most of them do it very carefully and in limited circles of friends and families. It's a good start. ("What Is It Like", n.d.)

When they reveal their views, many atheists become disowned by their families and find consolidation and support in online communities. Yet, members of online communities tell journalists that they are also ready to form an offline community. This happened when, in 2013, a large sum of money was donated to a non-believer by other atheists, so that he could pay the debts to his estranged father (Schonhardt, 2013).

For campaigners like Karl Karnadi, the online presence and the connected offline meetings of atheist groups are only the beginning of what they envision as an Indonesian society that holds a place for atheists, just as it holds a place for different religious groups. Such a society would, most of all, allow atheists to speak their mind openly and publicly, and it would allow them to publicly show their identity as atheists just as others show their identity as Muslims, or Christians. Yet the path they have chosen is rather problematic as it builds on the international terminology of identity and, hence, underlines their (ir)religious identity. In other words, they claim the right to be something rather than the right to do something. By this, they defend the freedom of religion rather than the freedom of speech, and thus end up using religion as their central frame of reference.

The political theorist Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (2015) has investigated the consequences of a religious rights and freedoms model that singles out groups for legal protection as religious groups. According to Hurd, this model molds religious groups into discrete faith communities with clean boundaries and governs difference through religious rights. Social differences of various kinds get reduced to the category of religion. With such a narrow focus, the exploration of reasons for social exclusion and violence gets blocked. The focus on religious affiliation reduces possibilities for both understanding of and campaigning against social exclusion. A major effect that this sectarianization (Hurd, 2015) has for religious groups is the strengthening of boundaries and of claims to orthodoxy and authority. As I have argued elsewhere,

the use of online media in tandem with a rhetoric of minority rights has reinforced the identities of Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims in Indonesia and Malaysia (Schäfer, 2015). However, many of the problems of center-staging religious identity do not only concern those who are categorized as belonging to a particular religious group, but also, comparable to a strong ethnic group identity, apply for atheists and other non-believers. Atheists and others who vocally distance themselves from religion do so by relating themselves to religion or to (ir)religious minorities. In other words, they style their own identity as a community within the same model and frame which religious identities build upon. Religion again becomes the main marker of identity, and thus also contributes to what Hurd (2015) calls the "sectarianization" of irreligious or atheist groups. Even more so than in the case of those deemed deviants from their own officially recognized religion, atheists are vulnerable to this accusation, simply because of the term itself. The term ateis is neither of Malay nor Arab origin, but derives from ancient Greek. Its foreign taste on the Indonesian tongue (wrongly) suggests that there has never been any local form of non-belief, or belief without gods. The perceived 'foreignness' of the category invites both religious as well as nationalist critics to speculations and conspiracy theories. This hostility is only strengthened by the moral and financial support offered by foreign agencies to atheist groups. This perceived foreigness of atheism might as well be the reason why those local beliefs (*kepercayaan*) that are not officially recognized as religions and that are not centered on a particular deity were rarely attacked of being blasphemous, as atheist expressions were and continue to be today.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: FORMING FORBIDDEN IDENTITIES ONLINE

Formally, post-Suharto Indonesia is neither a religious, nor a non-religious state. When the judges upheld the old laws against blasphemy in 2010, they declared that Indonesia is a country with belief in one god, not an atheist country. Even though atheism is not technically illegal, religious affiliation is the norm. It is enshrined in the Pancasila, the state philosophy, and it is preserved in various laws, such as the marriage law, as well as in other administrative practices, such as the official ID card. Blasphemy is punishable by law, and with blurred boundaries, some atheist activism is deemed blasphemous by the state. The key aspect here is not the content of the message per se, but its visibility, which has been on the rise since the introduction of new media technologies in Indonesia.

In a media landscape where journalists often financially depend upon the people they report about, the Internet has become a very important platform for self-representation and the dissemination of dissent. For those who do not have the resources to pay journalists for favorable reporting, the Internet offers an array of possibilities. They can not only design their own long-term web presence, but also transmit their own perspectives via social media. In Indonesia, the persecuted Ahmadiyya community has experimented with its own YouTube channel (Schäfer, 2015), and has also successfully secured a place for Ahmadi perspectives in talk shows and reports. In a similar vein, atheist activists, many of whom live abroad, use the Internet to make their own voices heard. In a sectarianized society in which religion occupies central stage, some atheist activists fit their views and the discrimination against them by

turning atheism into a visible form of identity, standing side by side with the religious ones. When they avoid using their real names, the Internet allows activists to exchange views and to become visible without exposing themselves to the danger of violent attacks. In the same way, they use the Internet as a semi-public space to establish an identity that is formally discouraged in Indonesia. Not only did the Indonesian society discourage atheism within its long-lasting campaign against communism – also the Indonesian state, in principle, sanctions atheism and public atheist identities, as in the case of Alexander An, who coupled his atheist online presence with anti-Islamic insults and thus overstepped the line of what is tolerable in a religiously defined public sphere.

The Aan case, however, produced a heightened awareness and sensitivity about the state's regulation of belief. It also revitalized the public debate about what is and is not publicly tolerable and about the state's role in limiting the freedom of speech in matters of religious sensitivities. Those who opposed a relaxed attitude toward what should publicly be tolerable were able to demonstrate the limits they wanted to impose. Moreover, the state used the opportunity to reiterate its middle-ground stance on religious matters, as already demonstrated in the 2010 blasphemy law controversy. The international attention that the case garnered, together with the online network of various atheist websites that commented on the case, show how the Indonesian atheist community is further boosted, and also determined by international support. This is done not only through the increasing demand for religious freedom and the prevailing language of human rights, but also through moral and financial provisions of international atheist organizations flowing to their Indonesian counterparts. In this context, sectarian identity becomes ever more important: The campaigns of international organizations encourage much more sharply differentiated profiles of Indonesian atheists – and other minorities – than they might otherwise adopt. Thus, for Indonesian atheist activists, their newly gained visibility and confidence brings about the danger of reducing their identity to their stance toward religion at large. These markers of difference concentrate pressure at precisely the spot where the Indonesian society is most sensitive. In a nation that is already rapidly fragmenting into various religious and political camps, the growth of internationally well-connected communities may thus increase social tensions within society. Yet, for those whom online activism has enabled to 'come out of the closet' and finally connect with likeminded non-believers in Indonesia and abroad, this sacrifice might be worth the price.

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Exploring Leisure Time Activities and Sociodemographic Indicators of Subjective Happiness and Self-Perceived Health Among Filipinos

Joseph Anthony L. Reyes

▸ Reyes, J. A. L. (2016). Exploring leisure time activities and sociodemographic indicators of subjective happiness and self-perceived health among Filipinos. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *9*(2), 269-288.

This study explores the relationships of subjective happiness and self-perceived health with leisure time activities and sociodemographic variables among Filipinos. It uses data from the International Social Survey Programme 2007: Leisure Time and Sports (ISSP 2007), and is the first paper that specifically investigates the case of the Philippines. Ordinary least square and multinomial logistic regression analyses were conducted in this study. Age was found to have significant negative relationships with leisure time activity engagement, subjective happiness, and self-perceived health. Body Mass Index was found to significantly predict a better self-perceived health. Cultural, TV/music, and social leisure activities were found to be significant predictors only in some of the outcome categories of happiness and health, whereas physical leisure activities were not found to be significant. Notably, subjective happiness and self-perceived health were significantly predicted by subjective socio-economic status, but not by actual family income. Implications of the results are discussed in terms of the Philippines' context as a 'developing country' together with possibilities for an improved perception of quality of life among Filipinos.

Keywords: Leisure Activities; Philippines; Social Indicators; Subjective Happiness; Subjective Health

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INTRODUCTION

The progress and development of countries often focus primarily on the results of economic activities measured by market growth, gross domestic product (GDP), per capita income, purchasing power parity, employment, price stability, poverty incidence, and similar indicators. There has been, however, an observed disparity between the economic indicators and personal perceptions of well-being, giving rise to an increasing global trend toward the measurement of happiness or subjective well-being. Thus, rather than emphasizing purely economic growth, attention is now also directed toward the happiness of citizens, prompting various governmental agencies, international organizations, and private institutions to develop myriad ways of measuring indicators of well-being and societal progress (Boarini, Kolev, & McGregor, 2014; Domingo, 2014).

International longitudinal social surveys such as the World Values Survey (WVS) have shown that, for the past two decades, happiness had increased in

45 of the 52 countries where long-term data have been collected. The WVS observes that "since 1981 economic development, democratization, and rising social tolerance had risen to the extent to which people perceive that they have free choice, which in turn has led to higher levels of happiness around the world" (World Values Survey Association, 2016). Similar to some other developing countries, the Philippines can be considered as a case wherein the economic situation of the country and a relatively high perception of happiness by its people may be incongruent, as the country demonstrates a relatively low economic performance. Being among the bottom half of countries in the world in terms of GDP for the past two decades, the Philippines was ranked 119 out of 187 countries in the International Monetary Fund Report 2014 and 118 out of 185 countries by the World Bank in 2013 (The World Bank, 2016). Despite this rather cheerless economic situation, happiness and life satisfaction in the Philippines have been found to be relatively high in several international studies. In fact, Filipinos are considered to be among the world's happiest citizens according to the recent Gallup Poll's Positive Experience Index that was conducted in 143 countries, with the Philippines ranking fifth (Clifton, 2015). The Happy Planet Index (Abdallah, Michaelson, Shah, Stoll, & Marks, 2012), which measures human well-being and environmental impact, designed to challenge established indices of national development, such as GDP and the Human Development Index (HDI), ranks the Philippines among the upper quartile for all three of its reports over the recent decade. Using aggregate data from the WVS in 2005 on the question of overall happiness, the website NationMaster.com ranks the Philippines 12 out of 50. Even a decade ago, in a study of 90 countries (Veenhoven, 2004), the Philippines ranked 32 in terms of life satisfaction. As a result, the Philippines' *National Statistical Coordination Board* (NSCB) has considered developing its own Happiness Index. It aims to take into account happiness in combination with conventional economic indicators to come up with a more appropriate measure of the progress of Filipino society. Though its guiding principle is the fact that economic progress and happiness are not synonymous, these concepts are not entirely mutually exclusive concepts (Virola, Encarnacion, & Pascasio, 2011, p. 4986). Thus, with these recent institutional developments and an emphasis on measuring the well-being of people, the study of the determinants of happiness or subjective well-being becomes ever more relevant for those working toward not only understanding, but possibly also improving the quality of life in a more integrated approach. Leisure and health are two aspects that have been considered in various studies on subjective well-being conducted in different countries (Brajša-Žganec, Merkaš, & Šverko, 2011; Hribernik & Mussap, 2010; Rossi, Ateca, Gerstenbluth, & Mussio, 2014). In Australia, for instance, it was found that leisure is a life domain that contributes significantly to subjective well-being (Hribernik & Mussap, 2010, p. 703). Results of another study conducted in Croatia show that engagement in various leisure activities significantly contributed to subjective well-being and allowed people to build social relationships, feel positive emotions, acquire additional skills and knowledge, and therefore improve their quality of life (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2011, p. 87). Numerous studies have been conducted to additionally determine what specific leisure activities are associated to subjective happiness and well-being. Yet, as Brajša-Žganec et al. (2011) note, "though varying numbers of leisure activities groupings have been identified in the literature, there is no general agreement about the classification of

leisure activities as well as which specific groups predict subjective well-being" (p. 82). Similar studies have explored determinants and structural relationships of perceived health, happiness, and Body Mass Index (BMI) together with sociodemographic variables in countries such as the Netherlands (Cornelisse-Vermaat, Antonides, Van Ophem, & Van Den Brink, 2006, p. 152), where they found that BMI was an important determinant of perceived health, which in turn increased happiness in Dutch society. In England, on the other hand, findings indicated that happiness showed a positive correlation with self-efficacy and negative relationship with BMI (Cook & Chater, 2010, pp. 61-62). Multinational studies have been conducted to define the impact of religiosity on happiness, well-being, and life satisfaction (Elliott & Hayward, 2009; Gebauer, Nehrlich, Sedikides, & Neberich, 2013; Joshanloo & Weijers, 2015), with results indicating that religiosity mitigates the negative effects of various factors toward people's subjective happiness, especially in poorer or oppressed countries. Despite the vast literature that explores the various aspects of subjective well-being utilizing social indicators from international surveys, very few studies conduct a focused analysis on the Philippines. Studies that include the Philippines have found various significant relationships to subjective happiness such as self-esteem, satisfaction with life, measures of delight and terror, positive affect and negative affect (Swami et al., 2009). Moreover, in a study conducted in the Philippines by the NSCB among four different subpopulations, low income family members or individuals with employees of two governmental and one private agencies were compared. It was found that happiness deriving from controllable domains (internal factors) was higher than from those that are not controllable (external factors), regardless of gender or subgroup (Virola, Encarnacion, Pascasio, & Clavido, 2010). Specifically, happiness derived from domains such as community and volunteer work, cultural activities, education, family, health, income and financial security, friends, love life, sex life, leisure and sports, religion and spiritual activities, technological know-how, work, and food, is higher compared to external factors like the economy, environment, government, politics, and peace and security (Virola et al., 2010, p. 11).

For the International Social Survey Programme 2007 module on Leisure Time and Sports (ISSP 2007) multinational studies were conducted to explore the relationship between leisure time and happiness (Haller, Hadler, & Kaup, 2013; Pampel, 2012; Wang & Wong, 2014). The survey addresses leisure time related issues such as different forms of leisure time activities; the relation of leisure to work and other spheres of life; and the social determinants and consequences of leisure. For instance, survey data from 33 countries showed that family income and individual demographic variables, such as age and health condition, are associated significantly with happiness (Wang & Wong, 2014, p. 111). Up to date, no research has been conducted that utilizes the ISSP 2007 survey data to focus on the leisure activities of Filipinos and their relationships to subjective happiness and perceived general health. As the ISSP data set is relatively large and robust compared to most localized surveys conducted in the country, it is an opportunity to gain better insights into general public opinion based on a wide range of respondents in the Philippines.[1]

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1 Each yearly wave of ISSP surveys collects sociodemographic as well as substantive (based on citizens' opinion) data on various topics.

This paper investigates survey data related to the subjective well-being of Filipinos in terms of self-reported happiness and health. It will explore and determine statistically significant relationships among substantive variables (e.g., attendance of religious services, self-placement on a top-bottom socio-economic scale, conception of an ideal shape of a man and a woman) that relate to leisure activities and included sociodemographic indicators (e.g., age, education, family income, or marital status). For this paper, leisure activities refer to behaviors that a person voluntarily engages in when free from work or familial responsibilities. Happiness is how respondents currently consider how happy or unhappy their life is in general. Concerning health, they are asked how healthy they felt in general. The analysis specifically addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the social structuring dimensions of leisure time activities that Filipinos engage in and what are the significant predictors of these activities?
2. What are the significant predictors of overall happiness among Filipinos?
3. What are the significant predictors of subjective general health?

Finally, the study also aims toward a better understanding of the implications of the findings, comparing them with results from relevant literature and relating them to the Filipino context and to possibilities of improving general perceptions of the quality of life.

DATA AND METHODS

Analyses are based on data from ISSP 2007. ISSP data sets are provided by the Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung (The Central Archive for Empirical Social Research), University of Cologne, and can be found at the GESIS Data Archive.[2] The ISSP is a collaboration of social scientists developing annual cross-cultural comparable surveys in currently 53 participating nations. It is a continuing program that covers various recurring topics important for social science research and conducts surveys focused on a single topic each year. The ISSP 2007 Leisure Time and Sports module was developed between 2003 and 2006, fielded in 36 countries, and was conducted in the Philippines from March 2008 to May 2008 by the *Social Weather Stations* (SWS).[3] The module covers activities, attitudes, and values related to leisure and satisfaction. It measures myriad aspects of leisure that include for instance the meaning of time and leisure, its relation to work and other spheres of life, and the social determinants and consequences of leisure, together with sociodemographic variables. The sampling procedure is a stratified, multistage random sample considering region, household, and persons within the household. For the Philippine subsample the target populations were adults with age ranging from 18 to 91 years old. The sam-

2 The archive can be accessed at http://www.gesis.org/en/institute/gesis-scientific-departments/data-archive-for-the-social-sciences/.

3 The SWS is a private non-stock, non-profit research institution in the Philippines that conducts regular public opinion surveys on various issues including politics, economics, and social issues. Most prominent, the Social Weather Indicators include quality of life, change in economy, and satisfaction with public authority figures.

ple for the survey was 1,200 with an equal number of female and male respondents. The surveys were conducted using English, Filipino, Iluko, Bicol, Hiligaynon, Waray, Cebuano, Maranao, and Chavacano languages. Independent variables for this study are individual sociodemographic characteristics together with substantive variables, and a derived BMI score based on respondents' height and weight using the standard formula, defined as the weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in meters (kg/m^2)[4]. Similar to previous empirical research on happiness, health, and weight aspiration (Kelaher, Williams, & Manderson, 2001; Natvig, Albrektsen, & Qvarnstrøm, 2003; Pampel, 2012; Schieman, Pudrovska, & Eccles, 2007), this study adopts a combination of methods established and utilized in these studies. It employs *factor analysis* of the different variables on the frequencies of engaging in various leisure activities in order to find the underlying dimensional items (Pampel, 2012). Aside from finding latent dimensions, this also allows a reduction in the number of variables used in the regression models and addresses issues of *multi-collinearity*. Explorative factor analysis via the *principal component method* available in SPSS (Field, 2009) was conducted on the Philippine subsample focusing on 12 ISSP variables categorized under "Leisure Time: Activities and Satisfaction". Questionnaire items ask respondents how often they do particular activities during their free time – time that they are not occupied with work or household duties or other activities that they are obliged to do. These were rated by respondents on a five point scale ranging from 1 (daily), 2 (several times a week), 3 (several times a month), 4 (several times a year or less often), or 5 (never). These were recoded as to represent the scores in an increasing manner – 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Additional details on these variables can be found in the appendix section and the questionnaire documentation in the ISSP archive.

Factor analysis of the Philippine subsample shows three dimensions (cultural, social, and TV/music activities) with *eigenvalues* greater than one. Together, these three account for over 42% of the variance observed in the data. This study follows the criteria used in the exploratory factor analysis for determining the number of principal components to retain based on the *Kaiser criterion* or *K1 rule of eigenvalues* greater than one and the *Scree test*, where eigenvalues are plotted against the number of components. As the plot moves toward latter components there is a relatively sharp decrease in *eigenvalues* which then levels off (Field, 2009, pp. 639-641; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006, pp. 607-675).

After determining the underlying dimensions of activities, standardized scales are constructed for the three factors (cultural, social, and TV/music), adding the item of physical activities, in a similar fashion to the procedures of Pampel (2012). These variables or dimensions are treated as continuous in the subsequent analyses. Thus, to address the first research objective, the four variables are used to examine the social structuring of leisure time activities, where each of the dimensions is used as the outcome in multiple regressions with sociodemographic variables (Pampel, 2012). Adopting similar methods employed in social sciences and medicine for studying happiness (Natvig et al., 2003) and health (Kelaher et al., 2001), *multinomial regression analyses* are used to address research objectives 2 and 3 (see Introduction).

4 For more information on the derivation and usage of the BMI, refer to the World Health Organization (www.who.int/bmi).

The analyses focus on the relationships of leisure activities, other substantive and sociodemographic variables with respondents' categories for overall happiness, and general health. Categorization was obtained by recoding responses in the following manner: For the statement on subjective happiness asking respondents: "If you were to consider your life in general these days, how happy or unhappy would you say you are, on the whole…?", those who responded as "Not at All Happy" and "Not Very Happy" were recoded as 1, those who responded as "Fairly Happy" as 2, and those who responded as "Very Happy" were recoded as 3. The statement on self-assessed health asking respondents: "In general, would you say your health is…?", those who responded as having "Poor" and "Fair" were recoded as 1, those who responded as "Good" as 2, and those who responded as "Very Good" and "Excellent" were recoded as 3.

With responses for the respective items recoded into three categories, it is treated as a *polychotomous* variable with membership to either category 1, 2, or 3: It is thus possible to use multinomial logistic regression – a form of logistic regression to predict membership (Field, 2009; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006, pp. 464-503). The analysis presents a series of comparisons between one category against a specified reference category (Field, 2009, p. 300). Estimates for the parameter can be identified compared to a base line category that was specified for this study based on relevant literature and allowing for distinctive contrast, as those who are not at all happy, or not very happy, and feel they have poor, or fair health. Multinomial regression analysis estimates the effect of predictor variables on the natural log of the odds of the outcome, and allows exploration of qualitative differences between the three outcomes (Field, 2009, pp. 308-309). Tables 3 and 4 present corresponding parameter estimates and model information for the respective analyses.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Descriptives

In terms of overall happiness, as presented in Table 1, only 19.3% of Filipino respondents indicated that they were unhappy whereas almost half (49.5%) were fairly happy and 31.2% responded as being very happy. For self-perceived general health, 40.8% felt that they had poor or fair health, 29.4% felt that they had good health, and 29.9% said they had very good or excellent health. Thus overall, the sample descriptive statistics indicate that the majority of the Filipino respondents stated to feel happy and generally at good health. A *Spearman's correlation* was performed to determine the *bivariate* relationships between responses of being happy (fairly and very happy), feeling good health (good and excellent), and their respective BMI. Two significant relationships were found: An extremely significant correlation between being happy and feeling at good health (= .241, n = 1198, $p < .001$), while a very weak but significant correlation was found between feeling good health and BMI (= .241, n = 1198, $p < .05$). According to the means of the component variables of leisure time activities for Filipinos, the most popular activities were watching television, listening to music, and getting together with friends, whereas the least popular activities were spending time on the Internet/PC, attending cultural events, and playing cards or board games.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Sociodemographic					
Female	1200	0.50	0.50	0	1
Age (decades)	1200	3.99	1.54	1.8	9.1
Education	1200	5.21	2.28	1	10
Married	1200	0.68	0.47	0	1
Urban	1195	0.54	0.50	0	1
Employed-School	1194	0.58	0.49	0	1
Subjective Status (self-placement)	1197	4.86	1.87	1	10
Attendance of Religious Services	1196	5.17	1.52	0	7
Family Income (thousands)	1130	8.99	9.40	0.00	100.00
Body weight related					
BMI	985	22.19	3.95	13.85	41.62
Image of Ideal Man (slender)	1198	0.45	0.50	0	1
Image of Ideal Woman (slender)	1198	0.54	0.50	0	1
Leisure Time Activities (factor analyzed)					
Cultural	1200	0	1	-1.59	3.85
Social	1200	0	1	-2.30	3.29
TV/Music	1200	0	1	-3.95	0.90
Physical	1200	0	1	-1.65	2.14

Multinominal		Categories		
		Not at All & Not Very Happy	Fairly Happy	Very Happy
Overall Happiness	1198	231	593	374
		Poor & Fair Health	Good Health	Very Good & Excellent Health
General Health	1199	489	352	358

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and distribution of multinomial categories. (author's compilation of data available from the ISSP archive).

Factor Analysis and Ordinary Least Square Regression for Leisure Time Activities

Results from the exploratory factor analysis using the principal component method on the 12 leisure time variables revealed that, for the Philippine subsample, variation is explained by three factors: The first factor was cultural, thus composed of going to movies, shopping, spending time on the Internet, reading books, and attending

cultural events; the second factor was composed of social activities such as playing cards, getting together with friends, attending sporting events as spectators, doing handicraft or woodwork, and getting together with relatives; and the third factor was composed of listening to music and watching television. The interpretations of these factors are somewhat similar to the findings in the study made by Pampel (2012) for sedentary activities. Herein, the cultural dimension is linked to high socio-economic status (SES) activities which entail high personal expense and investment for access in comparison to other leisure activities (Pampel, 2012, p. 401). The second factor includes socializing activities such as playing cards or board games, getting together with friends, attending sporting events as spectators, doing handicrafts or woodwork, and getting together with relatives that are not living in the same household. Four of the five items clearly have a social component, for instance cards and board games which are usually played with other people during get-togethers and as pastimes during idle moments, colloquially termed in the Filipino language as *istambay* or *tambay* (from the English word "standby"), usually in public areas. As for the handicraft or woodwork activity, it may be social in terms of how it is conducted with other people or for the intended purpose of their crafted items, which may serve social functions such as sporting events, processions, or *fiestas* (town festivals), by making team uniforms, themed costumes, party favors, toys, props, streamers, or banners. The do-it-yourself aspect combined with doing it with other people may not only allow savings compared to buying finished commercial products from stores or malls, but also allows a sense of bonding, team building, and *pakikisama* (camaraderie). The last factor is composed of listening to music and watching television. After the initial outlay for audiovisual equipment, these are essentially two activities that comparably require the least amount of money and effort in order for the respondents to enjoy. Understandably, these two are the most frequent leisure time activities that Filipinos partake in.

The social structuring of leisure time activities is examined using *ordinary least square regression*, where each of the three dimensions plus taking part in physical activities was used as the outcome in multiple regressions with sociodemographic and substantive variables. As reported in Table 2, all models were found to be significant. Among predictors, age was found in three models as significantly reducing the more engaging cultural, social, and physical activities, but was not found to be significant for listening to music and watching television. Similarly, being married was also found to be negatively associated with the three aforementioned activity types, most strongly with cultural activities. Education was significant across the three models of cultural, physical, and TV/music, but not for participation time in social activities. Urban residence is associated significantly with more TV/music and physical activities, which may possibly be attributed to easier access to actual (basketball, volleyball, badminton courts) or ad hoc (street basketball, hopscotch) sporting facilities and the availability of commercial audiovisual entertainment products, or broadcasting infrastructures and public utilities such as electricity grids, compared to rural areas. Being female was only found to be negatively associated with social and physical activities, though it must be noted that these are the strongest associations (unstandardized b = -0.653, -0.491 respectively) found on all four models.

	Leisure Time Activities											
Sociodemographic Predictors	*Cultural*			*Social*			*TV / Music*			*Physical*		
Female	0.071	(0.054)		-0.653	(0.060)	***	-0.050	(0.061)		-0.491	(0.060)	***
Age (decades)	-0.128	(0.018)	***	-0.084	(0.020)	***	-0.027	(0.020)		-0.086	(0.020)	***
Education	0.154	(0.013)	***	0.009	(0.014)		0.081	(0.014)	***	0.051	(0.014)	***
Married	-0.206	(0.058)	***	-0.150	(0.063)	*	-0.035	(0.064)		-0.172	(0.063)	**
Urban	0.020	(0.054)		0.106	(0.058)		0.219	(0.060)	***	0.177	(0.059)	**
Employed-School	0.039	(0.056)		-0.077	(0.061)		-0.094	(0.062)		0.006	(0.061)	
Subjective Status	0.007	(0.014)		0.009	(0.016)		0.043	(0.016)	**	-0.012	(0.016)	
Family Income (thousands)	0.009	(0.003)	**	0.006	(0.003)		0.004	(0.003)		0.004	(0.003)	
(constant)	-0.327	(0.134)	**	0.611	(0.146)	***	-0.568	(0.149)	***	0.358	(0.146)	*
N	1121			1121			1121			1121		
R square (adj.)		0.247	***	0.134015	***	0.081504	***	0.126408	***			

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Figures in each column are unstandardized coefficients and figures in parenthesis are standard errors.

Table 2. Multiple regression coefficients for predictors of leisure time activities in the Philippines. (author's compilation, with methods adapted from Pampel, 2012).

If you were to consider your life in general these days, how happy or unhappy would you say you are, on the whole?

					95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)		
		B	SE		Lower Bound	Odds Ratio	Upper Bound
Fairly Happy							
	Age (decades)	-0.244	(0.067)	***	0.687	0.784	0.894
	Cultural	0.184	(0.126)		0.938	1.202	1.540
	Social	-0.054	(0.116)		0.755	0.948	1.190
	TV/Music	0.140	(0.100)		0.947	1.150	1.398
	Physical	-0.188	(0.107)		0.672	0.829	1.022
	Subjective Status	0.134	(0.055)	**	1.028	1.144	1.273
	Education	0.025	(0.050)		0.930	1.026	1.132
	BMI	0.052	(0.026)	*	1.001	1.053	1.108
	Family Income (thousands)	-0.008	(0.011)		0.970	0.992	1.015
	Attendance of Religious Services	0.158	(0.060)	**	1.041	1.171	1.316
	Female (0)	-0.068	(0.219)		0.608	0.935	1.435
	Married (0)	0.099	(0.214)		0.726	1.104	1.678
	Employed-School (0)	-0.205	(0.206)		0.544	0.815	1.220
	Urban (0)	-0.183	(0.196)		0.567	0.833	1.224
	Image of Ideal Man (corpulent)	-0.155	(0.211)		0.567	0.857	1.295
	Image of Ideal Woman (corpulent)	0.474	(0.216)	*	1.053	1.607	2.452
	Intercept	-0.572	(0.786)				
Very Happy							
	Age (decades)	-0.344	(0.075)	***	0.612	0.709	0.821
	Cultural	0.213	(0.134)		0.951	1.238	1.610
	Social	0.005	(0.124)		0.788	1.005	1.282
	TV/Music	0.296	(0.111)	**	1.081	1.344	1.672
	Physical	-0.179	(0.115)		0.667	0.836	1.049
	Subjective Status	0.143	(0.059)	*	1.028	1.153	1.294
	Education	-0.035	(0.054)		0.869	0.966	1.074
	BMI	0.051	(0.028)		0.996	1.052	1.110

Family Income (thousands)	0.011	(0.011)		0.989	1.011	1.034
Attendance of Religious Services	0.190	(0.067)	**	1.061	1.209	1.378
Female (0)	-0.271	(0.236)		0.481	0.763	1.211
Married (0)	-0.212	(0.233)		0.512	0.809	1.278
Employed-School (0)	-0.028	(0.221)		0.630	0.972	1.501
Urban (0)	0.025	(0.211)		0.678	1.025	1.549
Image of Ideal Man (corpulent)	0.128	(0.226)		0.730	1.137	1.771
Image of Ideal Woman (corpulent)	0.185	(0.231)		0.765	1.203	1.891
Intercept	-0.651	(0.847)				

Model $\chi^2 = 96.610$; $p < .0001$, -2 log likelihood = 1803.562, Pearson $\chi^2 = 1848.688$, $p > .2$; Deviance $\chi^2 = 1803.562$, $p = 1$. Pseudo R^2 (Cox and Snell = 0.099, Nagelkerke = 0.114, McFadden = 0.051). Chance accuracy: 37.87%, Model classification accuracy: 49.95%

Notes: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001;

Reference category is: Not at All Happy, Not Very Happy.

Table 3. Results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis for subjective happiness (author's compilation, with various methods adapted from Natvig et al., 2003; Kelaher et al., 2001; and Schieman et al., 2007).

Multinomial Regression for Happiness and Health

Both multinomial logistic regression models were found as having a statistically significant overall relationship between the combination of their independent variables and dependent variable, as indicated by model *chi-square tests*, and having overall accuracy rates that are greater by 25% than the *proportional-by-chance accuracy rate*. Two measures of R^2 (*Cox and Snell's measure* and *Nagelkerke's adjusted value*) for each model are reported in their respective tables (Table 3 and Table 4), indicating fairly decent effect.

Table 3 presents results from the multinomial logistic regression model for subjective overall happiness of Filipinos. With those who reported being unhappy (not at all happy and not very happy) as the reference category, findings reveal that age had moderate negative associations on the odds of being happy – thus the older the respondents are, the less happy they felt. On the other hand, subjective status and attendance to religious activities were found to have almost similar positive associations on the odds of being happy.

In general, would you say your health is ...?

					95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)		
		B	SE		Lower Bound	Odds Ratio	Upper Bound
Good							
	Age (decades)	-0.143	(0.061)	*	0.769	0.867	0.977
	Cultural	0.021	(0.107)		0.829	1.022	1.260
	Social	0.111	(0.102)		0.915	1.117	1.363
	TV/Music	0.045	(0.089)		0.878	1.046	1.245
	Physical	-0.037	(0.096)		0.798	0.963	1.163
	Subjective Status	0.057	(0.048)		0.963	1.059	1.164
	Education	0.074	(0.044)		0.989	1.077	1.173
	BMI	0.041	(0.023)		0.997	1.042	1.089
	Family Income (thousands)	-0.003	(0.009)		0.979	0.997	1.015
	Attendance of Religious Services	-0.027	(0.056)		0.873	0.974	1.086
	Female (0)	0.131	(0.190)		0.786	1.140	1.655
	Married (0)	-0.027	(0.186)		0.676	0.973	1.402
	Employed-School (0)	0.355	(0.181)	*	1.000	1.426	2.034
	Urban (0)	0.082	(0.172)		0.774	1.085	1.520
	Image of Ideal Man (corpulent)	0.010	(0.187)		0.700	1.010	1.456
	Image of Ideal Woman (corpulent)	0.144	(0.187)		0.800	1.155	1.667
	Intercept	-1.437	(0.704)	*			
Very good, Excellent							
	Age (decades)	-0.312	(0.067)	***	0.642	0.732	0.835
	Cultural	0.177	(0.107)		0.968	1.194	1.471
	Social	0.216	(0.102)	*	1.017	1.241	1.515
	TV/Music	0.183	(0.097)		0.993	1.201	1.452
	Physical	-0.011	(0.097)		0.819	0.989	1.195
	Subjective Status	0.112	(0.049)	*	1.015	1.118	1.232
	Education	0.046	(0.044)		0.960	1.047	1.143
	BMI	0.080	(0.022)	***	1.037	1.083	1.131

Family Income (thousands)	-0.009	(0.010)		0.972	0.991	1.011
Attendance of Religious Services	-0.044	(0.058)		0.854	0.956	1.071
Female (0)	-0.207	(0.195)		0.555	0.813	1.190
Married (0)	-0.440	(0.196)	*	0.439	0.644	0.946
Employed-School (0)	0.126	(0.187)		0.787	1.134	1.635
Urban (0)	0.044	(0.175)		0.741	1.045	1.473
Image of Ideal Man (corpulent)	0.119	(0.189)		0.778	1.126	1.631
Image of Ideal Woman (corpulent)	-0.139	(0.191)		0.599	0.870	1.265
Intercept	-1.169	(0.709)				

Model χ^2 = 95.931; p < .0001, -2 log likelihood = 1917.303, Pearson χ^2 = 1861.275, p > .2; Deviance χ^2 = 1917.303, p = 1. Pseudo R^2 (Cox and Snell = 0.099, Nagelkerke = 0.111, McFadden = 0.048). Chance accuracy: 33.96%, Model classification accuracy: 45.78%

Notes: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001;

Reference category is: Poor, Fair.

Table 4. Results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis for subjective health (author's compilation, with various methods adapted from Natvig et al., 2003; Kelaher et al., 2001; and Schieman et al., 2007).

Interestingly, BMI had positive associations with being fairly happy, and respondents who had conceptions of the ideal shape of a woman being corpulent were more likely to report feeling fairly happy (b = 0.474, p < 0.05). Hence, the odds of being fairly happy compared to being unhappy are less for people who have a slender conception for the ideal shape of a woman. Cultural, social, and physical leisure time activities did not significantly predict whether respondents reported being fairly happy or being unhappy, and also did not significantly predict whether respondents reported being very happy or being unhappy. Only leisure time activities of listening to music and watching television significantly predicted whether Filipino respondents reported being very happy or being unhappy (b = 0.296, p < .01). Thus, compared with those who felt unhappy, the more that respondents listened to music and watched television, the more likely they would feel very happy. Table 4 shows the results from the multinomial logistic regression model for self-assessed general health of Filipino respondents. With those who say that their health is poor and say that their health is fair being the reference category, findings suggest that age had moderate negative associations on the odds of feeling at good and at very good/excellent health. Thus, the older the respondents were, the less healthy they felt.

Whether the respondents were unemployed or did not study at that time significantly predicted whether they reported as feeling at good health or feeling at poor/fair health (b = 0.355, p < .05). In other words, those who were employed or studied were less likely to feel at good health. Subjective status and BMI had moderate positive associations on the odds of respondents having feelings of a very good/excellent health. Whether the respondent was unmarried significantly predicted whether they reported as feeling at very good/excellent health or feeling at poor/fair health (b = -0.440, p < .05). Those who were married were more likely to feel at very good/excellent health. For self-assessed general health, cultural, physical, and TV/Music leisure time activities did not significantly predict whether respondents reported feeling at good health or feeling at poor/fair health. These also did not significantly predict whether respondents reported feeling at very good/excellent health or feeling at poor/fair health. Interestingly, only social activities significantly predicted whether Filipino respondents reported feeling at good health or feeling at poor/fair health (b = 0.216, p < .05). Thus, compared with those who felt at poor and fair general health, the more that respondents engaged in social leisure activities, the more likely they would feel at very good/excellent health.

DISCUSSION

Social Structuring Dimensions and Predictors of Filipino Leisure Time Activities

As exploratory factor analysis on the 12 leisure time variables revealed, variation is explained by three factors: the first factor being cultural, the second factor being social activities, and the third and final factor being passive activities such as listening to music and watching television. The structuring is comparable to the findings of Pampel (2012), with the exception of handicraft or woodwork activities being included in the social activities factor rather than representing a separate factor. Physical activities figured as a separate variable. Among predictors, being female was only found to be significantly negatively associated with social and physical activities. However, it must be noted that these are the strongest associations found on all four models. For physical activities, a possible explanation may be that, in the more conservative areas of the country, women may be expected to be less engaging in physically intensive outdoor leisure activities as opposed to men. Therefore, Filipino women tend not to engage in rough, boisterous, or sweat-inducing play in the humid tropical climate. The social aspect may be more complex to infer upon, though it can be assumed that safety concerns lie at the root of such results, considering that leisure time usually becomes available in the late hours after school or work. Unfortunately, nighttime in the Philippines is associated with high incidence of robbery, assault, and rape (Cabida & Zenit, 1995). Age was found to be negatively associated with engaging in cultural, social, and physical activities, but was not found to be significant for listening to music and watching television. Similarly, being married was also found to be negatively associated with social, physical, and cultural activity types. As for other independent, sociodemographic variables, education was significant for participating in cultural, physical, and TV/music but not for social activities. Urban residence is associated significantly with participation in more TV/music and physical activities.

Significant Predictors of Overall Happiness Among Filipinos

The relationship of age with happiness, along with leisure activity engagement, was found to be negative, thus similar to the findings of a study conducted in Croatia by Brajša-Žganec et al. (2011, pp. 85-88). Moreover, comparing the results of this study to observations in 33 countries, including the Philippines, deriving from the ISSP data set (Wang & Wong, 2014) and a study conducted in the Philippines by the NSCB (Virola et al., 2011, pp. 4988-4990), increased subjective happiness of being fairly happy and very happy, as opposed to not being happy, was found to be significantly predicted by subjective economic status. This shows that indeed happiness and economic progress are not entirely mutually exclusive concepts. Distinctive for this study's results is that progress related to happiness was found to be based on the subjective socio-economic positioning of a person rather than dependency on the income of the family. This goes well with observations that indicate that relative income may actually matter more than absolute income. As the findings of Luttmer (2004, p. 29) show, individuals' self-reported happiness is negatively affected by the earnings of others in their area. Increased earnings of neighbors reduce one's satisfaction with material aspects of life and have the strongest negative effect on happiness for those who socialize more in their neighborhood (Luttmer, 2004, p. 29). Moreover, subjective status and attendance to religious activities were found to have almost similar positive associations on the odds of being happy, which was more consistently significant in comparison to leisure activities where only radio and TV activities were found to be significant.

Significant Predictors of Subjective General Health

Subjective general health of feeling good/excellent was also found to be significantly predicted by subjective economic status. Among leisure activities, engagement in social activities made respondents feel healthier. This result is different from the findings obtained in a study conducted on elderly Singaporean respondents where poor self-assessed health was predicted by participation in chit-chat, visiting friends, and socializing (Chan & Jatrana, 2007, p. 480). Finally, it was found that married people were more likely to feel very good/excellent health. This is comparable to the results found in the Netherlands wherein being married or cohabiting had a strong positive effect on perceived health, and living together might even smooth one's social life and regulate meal times (Cornelisse-Vermaat et al., 2006, pp. 151-153). An inference that can be made on these results may be related to the lessening of stress due to the benefits that socialization and cohabiting provides, particularly in terms of child-care and child-rearing support, as well as to the alleviation of loneliness on the part of the elderly, especially in a developing country like the Philippines where extended family structures still prevail.

Implications of Findings

Overall, older people were significantly found to engage less in leisure activities, feel less happy, and less healthy. Moreover, happiness seems to be more significantly re-

lated to passive categories of leisure activity which participants derive entertainment from. This might be related to the relatively high commitment and active engagement in livelihood activities: It is not uncommon for Filipinos with full-time employment and even children to use what remaining free time they have for extra income activities, engaging in a second job, or entrepreneurship, colloquially termed as 'sideline' or 'racket', in order to make ends meet and help their families (Brizuela, 2014; Hutchinson, 2012). This can be seen in contrast to richer countries, where people may engage less in manually intensive labor, having more free time (sometimes mandatory), and getting bigger savings that would allow them to work less hours and have better access to expensive and diverse forms of leisure and recreational activities (Boarini et al., 2014; Gandelman, Piani, & Ferre, 2012; Haller et al., 2013; Rossi et al., 2014). Future studies can thus explore – given particular religious, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics such as those found in the Philippines subsample – whether certain leisure patterns and happiness indicators hold true among certain groups in both wealthy and developing countries. For instance, as noted in the multinational study by Haller et al. (2013), which also uses the ISSP leisure module data from 36 countries, time stress is understood as a subjective experience or anxiety which arises in situations of burden, often connected with the feeling that it will be difficult to cope with a certain task in a given time. Supposedly, for developing countries wherein individuals have low incomes and may also have different or fewer expectations, people live in time affluence (Haller et al., 2013, p. 404). Yet surprisingly, they observed that the Philippines stood out by having very high levels of time stress (Haller et al., 2013, p. 416). Other studies also found different significant relationships in comparison to this study, for instance, the relationship between BMI and happiness, which was found negative (Cook & Chater, 2010) – even with Filipino subsamples included in multiethnic populations (Pinhey, Rubinstein, & Colfax, 1997) – while this study finds it positive. In such cases, socio-cultural factors may yield clues when investigating different ethnic groups or members of different ethnic communities in a country.

Among the most interesting facets that this research uncovered is how happiness and even self-perceived health were significantly predicted by subjective socio-economic status, but not by actual family income. This suggests that for those who aspire to make citizens happier in developing countries it might be more rewarding to address the subjective perceptions of socio-economic position rather than the real socio-economic conditions. Conversely, for those who have low perceptions of subjective socio-economic status, as indicated by the significant relationships found in religious attendance and the TV/music leisure activity toward happiness, a similar approach toward contentment may be pursued. As religious attendance has a similar positive relationship compared to that of subjective socio-economic status, similar effect toward increasing happiness could be accomplished by religious leaders extolling virtues of contentment and serenity despite poverty and injustice during service. The results of this study also seem to reinforce some intuitive cultural conceptions in developing countries that warrant further exploration for anthropologists and geographers, such as the sociological aspects of happiness and forgiveness relevant to development and human rights issues. In their research in 11 countries, Gebauer et al. (2013) found that religiosity buffers the adverse consequences of poverty, wherein re-

ligious people in religious cultures reported higher well-being when their income was low compared to when it was high. This is similar to the analyses made by Joshanloo and Weijers (2015, p. 610):

> Belief in religion helps to deal with the negative emotional impacts of injustice at the national level, likely due to religious believers perceiving at least some injustice as a necessary part of some complicated higher plan for the greater good, rather than as a reason to be angry at, or lose faith in, God.

Limitations of the Study

The study focused on finding significant predictors and associations for leisure time activities, overall happiness, and subjective happiness, placing the results within the Philippine context. It aimed toward exploration rather than validating the causality of the relationships, particularly due to the cross-sectional nature of the study. The nature of the ISSP data also limits investigation to socio-cultural aspects rather than the physiological traits or medical conditions of respondents. On the offset, due to the limits of the survey data, the aim was not the creation of absolute predictive models nor was it arguing for cultural relativism. Though a function of the regression models is prediction, the main objectives of the study were to see if there are reliable relationships and to interpret the results within the context in which the research is being conducted. As such, it does not attempt to offer extensive cultural explanations or inference that are beyond the scope of the research questions yet may still be pursued in future studies based on the results found in this explorative study.

As with most survey data, there is always the possible limitation of self-reports wherein certain attributes and behaviors may be under or over reported. Due to the subjective nature of the variables analyzed, it may also be open to criticism in terms of the methodological approach, as well as the validity and reliability of subjective data (Gandelman et al., 2012). Because the survey was conducted by the Social Weather Stations and is in line with the standards and procedures of the ISSP, the author does not have the capacity to test the reliabilities of scales, validation checks, and explore other possible aspects that may limit self-reports such as social desirability, positive illusions, or the effects of present mood (Swami et al., 2009). In terms of overall design, a limitation acknowledged is that the study follows established relationships described in literature and prescribed models in relation to the available data. Thus for future research, there may still be possibilities to explore omitted variables. Though such variables have yet to be tackled in current literature, the next round of ISSP Leisure Time and Sports module that will be available in a few years may open opportunities for broader models to discern significant results from the additional sample data it provides.

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Searching for Digital Citizenship: Fighting Corruption in Banten, Indonesia

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▸ Fauzanafi, M. Z. (2016). Searching for digital citizenship: Fighting corruption in Banten, Indonesia. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *9*(2), 289-294.

The expansion of digital technologies and social media in Indonesia shifts practices of citizenship from a formal institutional level toward a more informal digital space. This paper presents the emerging results of research on digital citizenship in Banten, Indonesia, focusing on how new forms of citizenship are brought into being through digital acts that are defined as speech acts uttered through the use of social media. The paper follows digital acts of citizens in anti-corruption campaigns against the patrimonial and clientelistic regime of Banten's political dynasty that are predominantly staged on Facebook and other online platforms. These digital acts produce and intensify affective publics through which forms of digital citizenship are enacted in opposition to the corrupt dynasty.

Keywords: Banten's Political Dynasty; Corruption; Digital Acts of Citizenship; Facebook; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia today is among the top five countries with the highest number of social media users in the world (Ambardi, 2014). A number of studies have looked into how social media are used in the context of civic activism in Indonesia (Lim, 2013; Nugroho & Syarief, 2012). However, most of the examples of civic activism projected in these studies focus on the notions of participation and mobilization rather than on the formation of digital citizenship in the course of encounter between the state and its citizens in the social media (Isin, 2008; Lazar, 2008, p. 3; Neocosmos, 2009). If there is a focus on political agency formed through Internet-based civic activism, it mostly refers to activism of civil society organizations. Yet, to equate civil society organizations' activism with "citizens in action" (Nugroho, 2011) turns the notion of citizenship into something that is formal and programmatic. On the contrary, the expansion of new information and communication technologies and the growth of social media use have shifted both the meaning and practice of civic engagement from a formal democratic level toward a more informal level of "unorganized citizens" (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove, 2005, p. 182). Citizenship, in this sense, can be considered to be an "un-official, subjective, meso-level activity, taking place in a variety of sites" (Papa & Milioni, 2013, p. 27), including social media, and associated with performative activities, such as posting, commenting, liking, sharing, and so forth.

This paper presents the emerging results of the author's dissertation research examining the emergence of digital citizenship in Indonesia not simply as the ability to participate in an online environment of prescribed ethical behavior (McCosker, 2014; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008), but as a set of acts that designate political subjects emerging from the encounter between the state and its citizens on the Internet and in social media (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). These sets of acts are conceived of as digital acts that are all speech acts uttered through online activities such as blogging, messaging, emailing, tweeting, posting, liking, and commenting (Isin & Ruppert, 2015).

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND TACKLING CORRUPTION

This research focuses on emerging forms of citizenship in the discourse on corruption that appears on social media platforms in the region of Banten, Indonesia. As suggested by Gupta (1995), it is the discourse of corruption that "turns out to be a key arena through which the state, citizens, and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined" (p. 378). By digital acts such as reporting, posting, and commenting on corruption and on Banten's dynasty issues, people "construct the state symbolically and define themselves as citizens" (Gupta, 1995, p. 389).

Banten is a province in Indonesia that is characterized by the rise of a political dynasty and localized patronage network facilitated by the ongoing decentralization process (Nordholt & Van Klinken, 2007). The term political dynasty refers to the patrimonial and familial connections of elected public officials who dispose of a clientelistic network of local strong men, or *jawara*, and business associations (Hidayat, 2007). Banten's political dynasty grew when Ratu Atut was elected governor of Banten for two subsequent periods (2007-2012; 2012-2017) and the other members of her family took up important positions in the local government. This created incentives for corruption.

Anti-corruption activists have been investigating the dynasty's corruption cases since the foundation of the province of Banten in the year 2000. Some of these cases became not only a burning issue in local mainstream media but also a trending topic in social media. News, discussions, comments, and campaigns continue to appear today particularly on Facebook sites such as *Fesbuk Banten News* (FBN) – a citizens' journalistic page in which users recognize themselves as *warga* (citizens) of Banten. Postings, comments, and discussions among these *warga* relate to their ambitious desire to dismantle all corruption cases involving Banten's political dynasty. Founded in 2010, FBN is one of most consistent and well-known citizen journalists' social media pages in Banten. It currently has 73,000 fans, mostly from the capital city of Banten, Serang; about 500,000 readers per week and a ratio of 2,000 to 20,000 readers per post. Using a journalistic approach, FBN has become the social media platform that opens space for users to enact digital acts of citizenship.

Acts of Witnessing

One of the digital acts performed by the citizen journalists is the act of witnessing (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). Citizens openly state what they perceive about corruption and

the dynasty's political mal-practices. In the most-commented posting about the dynasty's political campaigns and strategies to win the governor election in 2011, citizen journalists of FBN witnessed how members of the dynasty, especially Ratu Atut, used underhanded campaign strategies including money politics.

Figure 1. Fesbuk Banten News Posting on Local Election Campaign. *In English: Do you want to have a healthy and fast-growing baby so that he/she can vote for the next local election…? Please eat this GOVERNOR branded breast-milk companion biscuit. The biscuit has been circulated in the nearest community health center . . . .* (figure by the author).

Citizen acts of witnessing injustice are particularly recognizable in their postings related to the corruption cases of Banten's political dynasty. Citizen journalists of FBN shared information about the following cases: discretionary social assistance grant corruption case, Ratu Atut's bribery case, BPK (*Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan*, or The Supreme Audit Agency) audit report case, Ratu Atut's corruption in Pandeglang elections, medical equipment procurement case, housing grant corruption case, Pandeglang regent's bribery case, and many more.

Acts of Flaming

One of the features of citizen journalism using social media platforms like FBN is that it not only enables citizen journalists and other users to perform acts of reporting or witnessing but it also facilitates the active participation of the 'audiences'. These 'new' audiences no longer represent passive recipients of information but actively participate in its reproduction by making comments, liking, or sharing this information.

Analysis shows that the highest number of comments on postings on corruption cases in FBN can be categorized as 'acts of flaming' with the main targets being Atut and Banten's political dynasty. Flaming is defined as an act of "displaying hostility by insulting, swearing or using otherwise offensive language" (Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur, 2010, p. 1537 in McCosker, 2014, p. 205), or simply expressing "disagreement or an alternative opinion or humorous play" (McCosker, 2014, p. 205).[1] The acts of flaming staged against Ratu Atut and the dynasty involve vitriolic speeches combined with irreverent and, sometimes, humorous expressions, as in the words of one Facebook user:

Figure 2. Screen Capture of a Comment on Fesbuk Banten News. *In English: Atut is only capable of taking care of her own face. You are a damn corruptor. Look at your own face in the mirror, it looks like the face of a pig.* (figure by the author).

These rants and vitriolic expressions of *warga* aimed at *dinasti* (dynasty) are also dominant in all comments on postings of corruption and the dynasty, which can be seen from the following diagram of the words most frequently used in FBN. As Figure 3 shows, *dinasti* (52%) and *warga* (42%) are the two most frequently used words in FBN. As such, these two terms become significant in FBN's digital speech. Moreover, the words of *dinasti* and *warga* have a substantial link in their context of co-occurrence, as it can be seen from the example in Figure 4.

The relation between the dynasty and citizens is antagonistic. Citizens are the ones who are opposed to the dynasty. Yet, in the middle of these two opposing words there is a huge cluster of harsh or vitriolic words such as *tolol/bego/goblok/koplok* (stupid/moron), *taek* (shit), *bacot* (shut your mouth), *bangsat* (bastard), *edan/gelo* (crazy), *monyet* (monkey), *babi* (pig), and *geuleuh/muak/mual/seneb/seuneub* (disgusted).

CONCLUSION

These emerging findings suggest that acts of witnessing and acts of flaming are the most dominant digital acts of *warga* uttered against *dinasti* in social media in the region of Banten. This emerging form of digital citizenship is essentially affective since it is enacted and manifested through the use of predominantly vitriolic words.

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1 See also Marc Caldwell's (2013) approach to 'acts of flaming' in online news forums by relating present notions of cultural citizenship to the concept of play.

Figure 3. Words-Cloud of Most Frequently Occurring Words in FBN's Postings and Comments. (figure by the author using Nvivo 10's word frequency query of texts in selected sources of FBN' postings and comments on Banten's political dynasty and its corruption issues from June, 2010 until June, 2014).

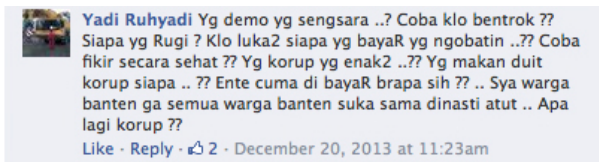

Figure 4. Screen Capture of Comment on Fesbuk Banten News. *In English: Those who protest will suffer ..? How if they fight ?? Who will lose ? If they hurt who will pay for the treatment ..?? Please think carefully ?? The corruptors are the one who will be happy . . . How much they will pay you .. ?? I am a citizen of Banten, not all citizens of Banten are in favor of Atut's dynasty .. they're so corrupt ??.* (figure by the author).

As Isin (2008) suggests, this kind of "hostile acts, as well as hospitality, indifference, love, friendship are not reducible to citizenship, but they can be intertwined with citizenship in significant ways" (p. 19). In this sense, online acts of flaming can be seen as an integral part of emerging forms of digital citizenship in the political context of Banten. Following the words that reflect the antagonistic position of citizens toward the dynasty, I choose to call these emerging digital citizens 'disgusted citizens'. They are *warga* who are disgusted (*seuneub/enek/geuleuh/muak*) by a corrupted *dinasti* or degraded governments. These preliminary findings point to those new forms of (digital) citizenship that go beyond dominant theoretical frameworks that define ideal citizens as making decisions based on reason. To understand these new expressions, one has to account for the mediated and affective elements of communication and of

how citizenship is perceived, experienced, and practiced in and through digital social space.

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Mobile Technology in the Lives of Thai Immigrants in Germany

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This paper examines the role of mobile technology in the lives of Thai immigrants in Berlin. By using qualitative research methods, this research investigates how new digital and social media applications have affected the organization of Thai immigrants on both individual and institutional levels, with a particular focus on the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin. Mobile technologies today are widely used in the diaspora, by both individuals and social institutions, to maintain relationships with the homeland and to promote national affairs. Both individual Thai immigrants and official staff of the embassy rely significantly on Internet sites, particularly on social networking sites such as Facebook, to gain information on Thailand and to expand their networks. This paper explores changes in communication and their implications for Thais and their respective institutions in Germany.

Keywords: Berlin; Mobile Technology; Royal Thai Embassy; Social Networking Sites; Thai Migration

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Across continents, the emergence of new communication channels has changed the central means to acquire information. Private individuals and social organizations increasingly use mobile technologies as tools to search information and convey their message. The nature of information is also subject to change. Information acquisition has been moved from physical materials to digital media not least due to the fast pace of online connections (Harper, 2011, pp. 55-56).

Among the variety of immigrant groups in Germany, Thai people make up a large number of foreign citizens. The immigration statistics of Germany collected in 2014, reveal that 58,827 Thais reside in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015). This number includes the first and second generation of Thais in Germany who still hold Thai citizenship. Thai immigrants have established networks and created group activities to stay connected with other members of the community throughout Germany. Before the development of widespread social media use, a large number of Thai immigrants in Berlin were only passive receivers of letters and flyers and lacked opportunities to respond. Today, these 'audiences' no longer take a passive role, but a more interactive and productive role (e.g., Chen, 2011, p. 757; Livingstone, 2004, p. 5). Individuals can now instantly give feedback or comment on a given data via social media platforms.

New media and mobile technologies have created new ways of communication that serve people in different circumstances, locations, times, and purposes.

Moreover, media ideologies point at people's capacity to interpret communicative possibilities and define the material limitations of particular channels (Gershon, 2010; Thompson, 2009). The online platforms most favored by Thai people in Germany include Skype, Facebook Messenger, LINE, WhatsApp, and different providers' operating systems such as Blackberry Message Service (BBM) and Apple's iMessage. Offering instant message services, these mobile social media platforms facilitate communication and information exchange and distribution among users equipped with portable computers and mobile phones.

This paper examines the role of mobile technologies in the daily lives of Thai immigrants and in the organization and work of related institutions such as the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin. The main objectives of this study are to demonstrate the interplay between popular uses of mobile technologies and Thai immigration to Germany, and to explore the changes triggered by the application of new media in representative organizations and institutions. The author argues that social media have become the key channel for connecting and networking among Thai immigrants in Germany. In order to accommodate emerging online practices, the Royal Thai Embassy is now facilitating online inquiries through its website. Information dissemination has also shifted from the use of text letters or posters to email or chat messages.

As the study shows, previous offline Public Relations (PR) strategies blocked the flow of communication between Thai individuals, respective organizations, and the general public because a number of Thai immigrants were unable to fully access traditional media such as newspapers and magazines. This resulted in some Thai immigrants disengaging from the circles of the government and their activities. Instead, they relied on family and peer networks in order to gather information relating to homeland affairs. Many did not participate in national events as information did not reach them in a timely manner. Only a few had established their social networks to share information, yet their offline connection remained limited. Unlike earlier traditional practices, PR via the Internet solved many accessibility problems (Thompson, 2009). Thus, new media eventually became the solution for the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin to reach Thai immigrants living in and outside Berlin and engage them in their activities.

Using interviews and participant observation, this paper scrutinizes current changes in the communication and organization among Thai immigrants in Berlin. Secondary data is drawn mainly from governmental statistics and documents. Interviews with the Royal Thai Embassy staff and Thai people with migration background living in Berlin were carried out in the period from June to September, 2015.

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

The study showed that mobile technologies are widely employed at both individual and organizational levels. Both formal and informal communication ranging from official announcements from the Royal Thai Embassy to everyday chatting occur on social media platforms and rapidly replace more traditional media. Previously, many Thai immigrants were not able to access information provided by the embassy because relevant news resources were limited to those well-connected groups living in the city centers. As the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin reported, while it was

its obligation to take care of its people, prior to using digital media, difficulties in information distribution platforms prevailed. The embassy facilitated Thai people's immigration, offered various services, and promoted Thai people's relations to the host country in every dimension. PR was considered the key tool to achieve these obligations; however, traditional media such as official leaflet announcements, posters, or the circulation of letters did not efficiently support the organization's tasks. The emergence of new digital media allowed a broader dissemination of information. It also affected the relations between the embassy and Thai immigrants in Germany on the whole, from communication and activities that were more interpersonal and official, to those more community-oriented and participative. The embassy now attempts to reach out to Thais overseas and learn more about them in order to promote their social welfare in the host country and keep them informed about developments in Thailand. New media worked well to serve these missions, staff reported. As mobile technologies transformed migrants' daily routes of communication, it also affected their homeland family attachments and the establishment of social networks at home and abroad. The embassy played a central role in upholding these ties.

Mobile phones today are used for various purposes, particularly for long-distance communication. Thai immigrants in Germany retain ties with their families in Thailand by connecting to the Internet via their mobile phones at no extra cost. Thus, they can stay in touch with family and homeland affairs much more often compared to previous times. Thais nowadays are far more active in using the Internet via their mobile devices (Fairfield, 2015), implying that there are more opportunities for them to automatically receive news from their social networks. In addition, portable devices such as smartphones or tablets make it possible for migrants to join family activities as if they were together. Placing tablets on the table at dinner time surrounded by family members and relatives in the country of origin is part of Thai immigrants' regular practices. Indeed, eating or having dinner together with the family is perceived as a very social pleasantry; Thais like to eat together, share food, and hold conversations while dining ("Understanding Thai Food", 2011). Thus, it can be argued that new media have changed some of the living patterns of Thai immigrants, from being physically separated from their homeland to being virtually connected via multimedia. Social media platforms allow users to enjoy talking with each other not only by sending and receiving text and voice messages, but also by exchanging pictures, video clips, and music. These multiple functions of smartphones are reported to enable ways of communication that appear more realistic and natural:

> I've been here for 11 years. In the beginning, I contacted my family using a prepaid phone card. The cost was expensive so I couldn't call that often. Now, we have the Internet; it saves a lot, yet the Internet quality in the past was not good – slow, unclear, lots of other devices needed to connect in order to make a call. Now, it is much better. The Internet quality is improved, fast, clear, and inexpensive plus we can use smartphones now. Video call is easily made from a mobile phone. It makes conversations from overseas more natural comparing to the abroad communication 10 years ago. (Vorapol, 33 years old, Thai migrant, 12 July 2015, Berlin)

Furthermore, mobile phones serve as information hubs; Thai migrants watch news, read articles, and listen to radio or music online. Reportedly, Thai institutions had to replace their traditional means of communication and information dissemination by digital resources:

> I would say numerous Thai immigrants in Berlin I work with do not seem to prefer highly informative sources. They like entertainment or merely summary of texts. We have to adjust information in the form of pictures and few sentences of short summary to communicate with Thais here. (Suree, 37 years old, embassy staff, 3 September 2015, Berlin)

A staff member of the Royal Thai Embassy reported that short messages, pictures, and group chat would better fit Thai immigrants' lifestyle and preferences since some of them had a limited ability to read and write in both Thai and German. Moreover, the increased demand for social media, and the exchange of music, news, and videos online among Thai people is likely to continue in the future, along with the arrival of the fourth generation (4G) of wireless broadband services (Suchit, 2016).

Mobile technologies foster transnational social networks and, as such, encourage migration. Facebook groups like *Thai Students in Berlin and Brandenburg* (TS Ber-Brand) and Thai Asa München offer space for potential migrants to post their questions on topics such as visa procedures, documents required for a student visa, courses available in German universities or German language schools, fees, etc. Thai immigrants who already reside in Germany can also advertise their businesses to potential migrants such as job vacancies or vacant rooms. Social networking sites are not only a space for seeking job opportunities, housing, and socializing, but also an online forum for people to set up their transnational network in order to share their feelings and experiences in the host land. For instance, the *Deutsch-Thai/Thai-Deutsch Dolmetscher/Übersetzer* (German-Thai/Thai-German Translator) network on Facebook currently hosts 812 members aiming to help migrants and potential newcomers to establish their networks by also learning German. It is an interactive online forum in which many Thai immigrants in Berlin and prospective immigrants to Germany take part.

The use of the Internet was also found to promote Thai integration. A number of websites administrated by the Thai government, for instance, www.thaiembassy.de, m.mfa.go.th, www.thaibizgermany.com/de, and dtan.thaiembassy.de, provide information on aspects of everyday life, career, language, education, and laws in Germany. Apart from these government run websites, a number of private Thai institutions take part in facilitating the process of integration, for example *Thai Articulate Their Rights Abroad* (*THARA*), *Puer Thai e.V. Berlin*, *Ban Ying e.V.*, and *THK Translation*. These privately run websites aim to provide migrants with useful information with regard to life in Germany. Today, potential migrants can also learn from the experiences of other immigrants through private blogs such as *Thai Freundschaft Gruppe Erlangen* (Thai Friendship Group Erlangen) or Educatepark. The information made available on these websites prepares migrants to adjust and comply with laws in the host country, unlike in the past when they lacked both understanding and sources of information regarding regulations and decent practices of living in Germany:

> Recently, after we uploaded guidelines concerning registration, consular services, and laws in daily life of Germany on our Facebook page and website, I noticed that many Thai immigrants were more confident and brought correct and complete documents when contacting us. . . . It is much faster to proceed documents for them in the embassy now. (Maneeya, 36 years old, embassy staff, 4 June 2015, Berlin)

> Our clients do not have to physically come at the embassy to inquire. They can drop questions in our emailbox or Facebook inbox and we simply reply them in a short time manner – generally within 24 hours. For example, a Thai traveler in Germany lost his passport, I could advise him what to do on Facebook, and things were solved without requiring his presence in the embassy. (Prapapen, 35 years old, embassy staff, 4 June 2015, Berlin)

Mobile technologies had a strong impact on the working relationships between the Royal Thai Embassy staff and its clients. It replaced the old working styles of the organization by a phenomenon known as "time shifting". Now staff could even set up their own online network groups in order to convey information via LINE chat or other instant message applications. Additionally, mobile technologies reduced the communication hierarchy. Previously, when staff needed to consult their supervisors, they had to follow the formal procedure by making an appointment with the secretary first. Staff had to check and wait for their supervisors' vacant slot and ensure they were in town. In contrast, today staff had set up LINE group chats where all staff members participate. Junior staff can post their questions directly to their supervisors in the group chat. Online communication has shown to have influenced offline hierarchies in ways that allow junior staff to communicate and work together closer and faster without going through order scales.

CONCLUSION

Thai immigrants to Germany increasingly build their transnational social networks through the use of new social media platforms. These ever expanding communication networks stimulate migration and prepare potential migrants for integration while facilitating life overseas. As in the case of the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin, mobile technology clearly affected organizational culture: The communication hierarchy is reported to have diminished, allowing them to adopt flat organizational structures. PR via Internet channels has strengthened the organization's capacity to promote the country's diplomatic affairs. The relationship between the embassy and Thai immigrants has also changed, allowing for online social networking. Due to the short-term nature of this research, this case reveals only a limited number of aspects related to the larger project of studying the interplay between new digital and mobile technologies and Thai migration to Germany. As such, it does not meet requirement of a deeper historical, political, and social contextualization of the transnational paths of Thai migrants. Yet, these initial findings may be indicative in exploring broader questions such as modern reinterpretations of enduring social hierarchies or the medial representation of Thai politics. In conclusion, I assert that new technolo-

gies, most prominently social media, have affected Thais' lifestyles and apparently improved much of their family and institutional relations in Germany and at home.

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"If It's on the Internet It Must Be Right": An Interview with Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation on the Use of the Internet and Social Media in Myanmar

Rainer Einzenberger

▸ Einzenberger, R. (2016). "If it's on the Internet it must be right": An interview on the use of Internet and social media in Myanmar with Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies, 9*(2), 301-310.

Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO) is a non-governmental organization in Myanmar focusing on Internet and Communication Technologies (ICTs).[1] Established in 2012, MIDO focuses on ICTs for development, Internet freedom, and Internet policy advocacy. In 2013, it organized the first Myanmar Internet Freedom Forum in Myanmar, supported by Freedom House. Phyu Phyu Thi is both co-founder and research and development manager of MIDO. She holds a master's degree in sustainable development from Chiang Mai University, Faculty of Social Sciences in Thailand, and a bachelor's degree in science from Yangon University. Her interests include technology and development, social media, diffusion of information, and behavior. Htaike Htaike Aung is co-founder and executive director of MIDO. She is working as a digital security and privacy consultant. She is also co-founder of the *Myanmar Blogger Society* and co-organizer of *BarCamp Yangon* – a user-generated conference primarily focusing on technology and the Internet which is part of a larger international network.[2]

Keywords: Cyber Security; Freedom of Speech; Hate Speech; Internet; Social Media

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Rainer Einzenberger: *Can you please introduce your organization MIDO and its objectives and program briefly?*

Htaike Htaike Aung: MIDO focuses on Internet and Communication Technologies (ICT) for development. We primarily focus on implementation, advocacy, and also capacity building programs. Currently, we implement an initiative that is called *Lighthouses*. These are community information centers. As part of our capacity building program, we develop curricula and trainings on digital literacy, media literacy, and trainings on digital security and privacy. As part of our advocacy work, we are also involved in research, for instance on hate speech, and additionally we work with our regional partners on baseline ICT surveys for instance. Additionally, we are doing short term research that focuses, for example, on digital security, network penetration, and mobile communication.

1 See http://myanmarido.org/

2 See http://www.barcampyangon.org/

www.seas.at doi 10.14764/10.ASEAS-2016.1-9

Rainer: *Five years ago, access to the Internet and smartphones was still extremely restricted in Myanmar. SIM cards used to cost hundreds of USD and Internet access was also unaffordable to most people, limiting Internet usage to less than 1% of the population. Yet, this has changed quite dramatically in the past five years. Now SIM cards come at a price of only a few USD and mobile Internet access is also affordable to many. Can you give us an idea about the current use of the Internet and smartphones in Myanmar?*

Htaike: So, for mobile coverage, if one combines all operators – Myanmar Post and Telecommunication (MPT), Oredoo, and Telenor – more than 90% of the population are now covered by mobile networks. So, technically, most people should have access now. But I want to emphasize that this is in terms of population, not the geographic coverage. This is of course different from actual usage. A recent baseline survey showed that only 39% of the population had a mobile phone and SIM card in 2015 (Galpaya, Zainudeen, & Suthaharan, 2015). According to the plan of the mobile service operators as well as the government, by 2018, more than 50% of the population will have mobile phones. The increase is very fast since the infrastructure has been rolled out very quickly. I think our mobile market is very unique since it was entirely a 'green field' with little infrastructure and very few users. Then, there were established operators from abroad (Oredoo from Qatar and Telenor from Norway) that came in. As soon as they started working, they very quickly built an infrastructure, such as radio masts for mobile phone signals. In terms of infrastructure, we are doing well and in terms of mobile usage, it is gradually growing. However, the accessibility of relevant content, applications, and people's digital literacy will still take some time.

Phyu Phyu Thi: As for smartphones, we have now cheap smartphones from China; and migrant workers from Myanmar's rural areas who went abroad also send smartphones back to their families. So, poorer households are now using smartphones too. This is why the usage is already very high and we have 'leapfrogged' to the smartphone era. This situation benefits people with regard to access to the Internet. But again, digital literacy and media literacy issues are very problematic at the moment.

Htaike: Broadband Internet is still rarely accessible here and people mainly access the Internet through mobile phones. Compared to mobiles, the ownership of laptops or desktops is very low. Only 2% of the population access the Internet through computers.

Rainer: *Is there still a digital divide in the country? What are the differences in usage and access between regions and with regard to gender, age, and ethnic groups?*

Phyu: Regarding gender, we found in our baseline surveys that ownership of mobile phones by women is a little bit lower than by men. And we can also say that women face more barriers in using mobile phones. Furthermore, they give priority to their family members and share phones with their family members. But the Internet usage of women is still very high.

Htaike: In general, rural areas are lagging behind in terms of access with a penetration of only 27% versus 65% in the cities. Of course, when looking at some of the geographic areas that have not yet been covered, they consist of areas that are difficult to access, including ethnic areas like Chin-State, other border areas, and also some areas in Rakhine-State. So, we can assume that because of the connectivity issues there, they do not have access to the Internet.

Phyu: Recently, we also did a research on mobile connectivity. For example, in Chin-State there is only MPT available in the capital of Chin-State. In other big cities, the connection is very slow and some areas can only use the slow Internet connection in the night time. So, there is a good coverage but the speed is very slow; this is crucial for accessibility as well.

Rainer: *Myanmar is a multi-ethnic country with over one hundred different languages. How is this reflected in the digital landscape and new media?*

Htaike: It's not reflected at all! The majority of the developed content is in Burmese language. Even the development of the Unicode versions of the ethnic scripts is still ongoing.[3] Unfortunately, the ethnic scripts are not widely used by the general public. So, there is not very much multilingual content developed. Just some small fractions, maybe in Karen. We don't see that much. We still have a problem with the standardization of the Burmese script to the Unicode. This is not completely solved yet.

Rainer: *New media and social media have been playing a big role in Myanmar since mobile phones and SIM cards are now easily available and affordable and the mobile network has been expanded. How do you see the role of new media today in Myanmar? How does it change society?*

Htaike: Well, when talking about new media and social media in Myanmar, you can only talk specifically about Facebook and, previously, blogs. But blogs are not that popular anymore, so everyone is on Facebook. It is dominating everything: businesses, public, media, etc. Everything that is going online in Myanmar is on Facebook. There is a saying here, that may also apply to other countries, that "Facebook actually is the Internet". If you are not on Facebook, then, you know, you can't catch the trend or what's happening, you can't get the breaking news; it is very difficult to live without that.

Phyu: Moreover, in the rural areas a lot of people use Facebook but they don't know how to create an account. So, they ask the mobile shop staff to install it for them, and they only use it by touching the icon on the screen. So, Facebook applications and news applications are very important. People also use messaging applications like Viber and BTalk. These are very popular too. They receive news through news applications, Facebook, and Messenger. They think Facebook is like a newspaper and use it for reading the news.

3 Unicode is an international standard for the digital coding of scripts and signs and enables people to use computers in any language.

Rainer: *Is Facebook then a challenge to the traditional offline media, print media, and TV?*

Phyu: We can say that there is a difference between rural areas and urban areas. For the cities, people are used to getting print newspapers and journals which they can read on the very day of publication. But the rural areas have to wait another day, or in some remote areas they have to wait three or four days to receive printed newspapers. By that time the news is not really up to date anymore. Facebook is instant. All the media outlets also have Facebook pages where people can read the news. Furthermore, the news applications on smartphones combine all the news from various news websites. Printed journals are not that popular anymore. When we asked questions about news in our surveys, respondents were talking about Facebook. But when we talked about TV they only used it to watch movies. It was not popular for news. TV is only for entertainment whereas Facebook and the Internet are for news.

Rainer: *In many countries, social media, in particular Facebook, has also been used as a tool by destructive political forces, in particular radical right-wing groups. In Myanmar, nationalist and radical Buddhist groups have been reportedly engaged in destructive use. How do they use new media for their agenda?*

Htaike: There is a big new space now that is available for people to do anything. So, there are positive usages and negative usages as well. Particularly in Myanmar, the usage of the Internet came so quickly. There is one thing that has led to this development, that is, we can say, people's perception of the Internet. Unlike in countries where people gradually got used to the Internet and learnt how to find good content, thus learning what is bad content, for Myanmar this hype went straight up and people did not have the time to reflect on what the Internet is actually about. This perception can be summarized in the phrase: "Okay, if it's on the Internet it must be right". This really is dangerous, particularly if there are people who are using the Internet for the wrong agenda and propaganda. That's how if you look a few years back, the use of online media to spread hatred and rumor was very common because of Myanmar people's perception of the Internet.

Rainer: *What can be done to tackle the problem of hate speech and negative propaganda on social media and what is MIDO already doing about it?*

Phyu: First, we are doing baseline surveys to understand the issue. And we are also undertaking an anti-hate speech campaign together with our friends from different civil society organizations. It is called *Pan Sagar* campaign (literally "flower speech") and includes the distribution of pamphlets, asking people to refrain from hate speech and more carefully consider the consequences of their actions on social media. The extremist groups use Facebook as their amplifier. The *Ma Ba Tha* (*The Patriotic Association of Myanmar*) has their own Facebook page and applications.[4] The extremist

4 Formed in 2014, *Ma Ba Tha* is also translated as the *Association for the Protection of Race and Religion.* Some members of the group are connected to the nationalist (and radical Buddhist) 969 Movement. A prominent member, known for his anti-Muslim hate-speech, is the monk Ashin Wirathu from Mandalay.

monk Ashin Wirathu and other people have their Facebook pages and regional pages as well. So, they develop a lot of Facebook content on that issue. In our earlier study, we found that deceiving propagandist content, such as videos, songs, and photos, is additionally sent via Bluetooth to mobile phones, for instance in tea shops – without people knowing where this content comes from and who is sending it. Another thing is that Facebook news is being printed and published on public campaigns by extremists. As I said earlier, people think that Facebook is an official media and take it for real. These are the kind of scenarios we see. Apart from the anti-hate speech campaign, we also run a monitoring project. Based on our analysis, we develop a curriculum for training sessions to understand new media as well as to develop media literacy. Furthermore, we initiate dialogue sessions to discuss about what is happening around, on, and off the Internet. Additionally, we engage with media people to discuss what is happening on Facebook on a monthly basis. We've also created a Facebook page called *Real or Not* to post photos and news and to analyze them. This is what we are doing right now.

Rainer: *What are the limits to freedom of speech online? Is the government also taking action against people engaging in hate speech?*

Htaike: So, our government is known to be infamous in using laws to limit citizens' rights to freedom of expression. If we look at the past five years, there was this law which we know as the Electronic Transaction Law, passed in 2004, primarily regulating e-commerce, electronic transaction, and electronic signature. One particular clause in that law was very vague. That clause said that whoever commits "any act detrimental to the security of the State or prevalence of law and order or community peace and tranquility or national solidarity or national economy or national culture" by using electronic transaction technologies can be imprisoned up to 15 years.[5] Many political activists and journalists have been detained on the grounds of that clause. For example, if you use any communication tool to harass, defame, or bully someone, then you might become subject to this sort of charge.

Rainer: *So, is this law a suitable legal means to prosecute people who engage in hate speech as it explicitly sanctions hate speech?*

Wirathu has been sentenced to 25 years in prison for his speeches in 2003 by the previous military regime but was released in 2012 along with other political prisoners under President Thein Sein's amnesty.

5 "Whoever commits any of the following acts by using electronic transactions technology shall, on conviction be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend from a minimum of 7 years to a maximum of 15 years and may also be liable to a fine . . . doing any act detrimental to the security of the State or prevalence of law and order or community peace and tranquility or national solidarity or national economy or national culture . . . receiving or sending and distributing any information relating to secrets of the security of the State or prevalence of law and order or community peace and tranquility or national solidarity or national economy or national culture . . . creating, modifying or altering of information or distributing of information created, modified or altered by electronic technology to be detrimental to the interest of or to lower the dignity of any organization or any person." (The State Peace and Development Council, 2004).

Htaike: No, during the military government it was used to oppress political activists and journalists. But now we have another law for such cases: the Telecommunications Law. There is a clause in it that says that whoever uses electronic communication to harass, cyber-bully, or defame, is liable to a prison sentence of up to five years. So, in the past years, there have been a couple of people arrested because of what they posted online on the grounds of that law.

Rainer: *What was the content of the postings?*

Htaike: Up to now, people that have been charged on the grounds of this law were people who posted things targeting the head of the military that were categorized as defamation; so basically criticism of the government.

Rainer: *Which action has been taken against radical extremists like Ashin Wirathu and the Ma Ba Ta and radical nationalist Buddhist organizations? Has there been any prosecution on the grounds of this law?*

Htaike: No, so you can see the problem with that.

Rainer: *Do you also follow the situation in your neighboring country Thailand with regards to the Computer Crime Act of 2007*[6] *and the increasing use of lèse-majesté legislation? What is your perspective on these developments given your own experience?*

Htaike: In Myanmar and Thailand, we have been relying on each other in the activists' scene. So, for Myanmar, up to five years ago, the activist community went to Thailand to seek refuge and to hold workshops and meetings if the case was sensitive. Many of Myanmar's NGOs that focused on supporting human rights were basically housed in Thailand, many in the border areas. But now, since Thailand's situation has changed, things have kind of reversed a bit. Just recently, we gave a training to some Thai activists who came to Myanmar to hold workshops on activism and campaigns.

Rainer: *How do politicians and political parties now use social media? Did social media play a role in the last elections and how do citizens respond to their new media presence?*

Htaike: They really use it a lot; social media are heavily relied upon, and I think overly relied upon by the politicians and the government as well. They even forgot to create their own independent websites. Even though there might be some websites, they usually contain only basic information that is not often updated. But Facebook sites are being updated regularly. Even now the President Office and spokespersons

6 The Computer Crime Act of 2007 contains several vague paragraphs regarding computer-related acts deemed detrimental to "public security and economic security" as well as acts damaging "the countries [sic] security or causing panic". This led to the persecution and imprisonment of people expressing their political opinion online, also with regard to the monarchy, which were deemed by the authorities as lèse-majesté (insulting the monarchy). Insulting the monarchy is punishable with prison terms of up to 15 years. The Computer Crime Act has been updated by the military government in 2014 and continues to violate basic civil rights according to human rights defenders ("An Unofficial Translation", 2007; Thai Netizen Network, 2015).

are using Facebook to disseminate information and everything. In their profile, we can see a mix of official declarations and also personal information, like the place where they are having dinner. There is a mix of public and private information.

Phyu: And then, during campaign periods, some of the candidates use social media very effectively, like to update on their campaign trip, or doing voter education on Facebook. If I am not wrong, only recently, one politician tried a live broadcast of a discussion over Facebook through the application Live. One group called *Open Platform* also organizes live discussions with Members of Parliament (MPs) over Facebook. There, you can watch and send questions directly to the MPs who will then answer directly. So, a lot of MPs are using social media, but they got a lot of problems, too, with people hacking their accounts or creating fake accounts.

Rainer: *This brings me directly to my next questions: There have been many cases of cyber-attacks in Europe and also the US recently. What is the situation in Myanmar?*

Htaike: So, concerning cyber security, we have a long history of websites being attacked for political reasons. Like, for example, around four or five years ago, there was this big cyber-attack that targeted mostly independent Burmese exile media like *Irrawaddy* and *Mizzima*. At that time, those websites were attacked and became inaccessible for weeks. So, we can say, it happened mostly due to political reasons. We also see that during some political tensions, like when there is a big controversy. For instance, concerning one of the islands that we might or might not share with Bangladesh – there were a lot of cyber-attacks on websites from Bangladesh, including some government websites. Another case of cyber-attacks related to a case in Thailand where two Burmese citizens were accused of murdering two tourists on an island. Then there were attacks on Thai websites. These were mostly politically motivated attacks. This is one thing, and for cyber security, we do have a government team, called the *Myanmar Computer Emergency Response Team* (mmCERT), but this only considers cases at top levels. What they mainly do is monitor Myanmar's Internet. But we don't see them being active that much. However, in the future, as there will be much more e-government initiatives coming up, these institutions should become much stronger and more supportive. There has been some independent research on government websites, and it was recommended by security experts to close some of the security loopholes. For now, the government does not seem to be that interested in making cyber security stronger. So, the capacity of local institutions that work on cyber security should be strengthened in the future.

Phyu: Concerning non-political things, we don't see much of these issues yet. Banking activities, for instance, are not yet happening online that much, but there might be a risk in the future.

Rainer: *You are also helping to review and consult on ICT laws. What would be your recommendation to the government regarding the ICT sector?*

Htaike: ICT is now becoming a cross-cutting issue, for example in the health sector, in the financial sector, and in socio-economic sectors. This should be thought of when the government is trying to introduce new laws. For example, the government just drafted a privacy law which seems entirely bizarre in the sense of privacy being defined inconsistently throughout the whole law. It also lacks data protection and online protection mechanisms that should be part of a privacy law. That's what happens when people don't think of ICT when trying to introduce new laws that are closely related to ICT.

Phyu: In addition, the government is currently preparing a hate speech law that is being drafted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Yet, hate speech is not only about religion but also about many other issues. It can create a lot of problems if they approve this law and use it. There needs to be more inclusiveness in the drafting process.

Htaike: Furthermore, the Electronic Transaction Law has not been amended much; just the prison terms have been changed but not the unclear clauses. Also, when looking at the Telecommunications Law, some clauses are very vaguely defined; that is a problem as well.

Rainer: *One last question: You mentioned on your website that your objective is also to reduce poverty through the development of information and communication technologies. How can this be achieved and can you give us some examples?*

Phyu: Now we are working on the Lighthouse information centers. The idea was to open around two hundred centers. Now, there are 62 all over the country. These centers are information centers where people can come and access information and learn how to navigate themselves online. The centers provide information about health, education, and job opportunities as well. And now we also have a 'safe Internet' education training which is a media literacy training. We set up these centers together with the mobile operator Telenor, trying to reduce the digital gap in the rural areas.

Htaike: Digital literacy is the key. That's why we conduct trainings and develop curricula around that issue; and the Lighthouse plays a big part in empowering rural areas, particularly in the use of ICT. In the development sector, ICT is already widely introduced. But I think that the very first step is to increase digital literacy. The second step will then be to deploy these skills.

Phyu: The costs are still a problem regarding the access to mobile communication and Internet. The three operators still charge relatively high prices which is a big barrier for a country like ours with low income levels. Since mobile phones are popular and became a kind of a lifestyle thing, the spending on Internet and mobile phones is high compared to the income levels both in rural and urban areas. I personally worry about the impact of the financial burden resulting from the costs of mobile phones and telecommunication services.

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Workshop Report: Social Media and Islamic Practice in Southeast Asia, 14-15 April 2016, Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences

Dayana Lengauer

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Above the rooftops of Vienna's old city center and on the top floor of the building of one of the world's leading technology companies, a selected number of international scholars working on new media and religion in Indonesia gathered early this year to discuss their current research.[1] They were invited by the Austrian Science Fund (*Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung*, or FWF) project "Islamic (Inter)Faces of the Internet: Emerging Socialities and Forms of Piety in Indonesia" led by Martin Slama, a researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The workshop, which was comprised of 12 presentations in the span of two days, focused on social media and digital technologies uses and Islamic practices of Muslims in different parts of Southeast Asia. The central question that informed this workshop was how the rising use of new communication technologies affects Islamic practices and forms of piety in the Muslim majority countries of Southeast Asia. The presentations touched upon a number of related issues including Islamic finances, fashion, music, and youth culture. They discussed changes in the perception and representation of religious authority or the revival of Islamic concepts in the light of social media uses. Apart from popular Islamic expressions of piety, some presenters addressed issues of religious sectarianism and sentiments of hate spread through the online presence of particular religious groups.

What remained uncontested throughout those two days was the fact that social media have become an indispensable part of the daily practices and socialities of Muslims throughout Southeast Asia (Barendregt, 2012; Slama, 2016). For example, followers connect to their Islamic leader, be it the local preacher or the country's most influential Sufi scholar, by simply opening Facebook. Islamic leaders, on their part, use social media as means of self-representation in yet unprecedented ways. These online presences trigger new perceptions and articulations of authority and preacher-followers relationships which do not remain uncontested. This is the case when, for example, self-representations on

1 Next to the workshop organizers, Martin Slama and Dayana Lengauer, invited guests who presented their work were Bart Barendregt (Leiden University), Carla Jones (University of Colorado Boulder), Daromir Rudnyckyj (University of Victoria), Eva Nisa (Victoria University of Wellington), Fatimah Husein (State Islamic University Yogyakarta), Ismail Fajrie Alatas (University of Michigan), John Postill (RMIT University), Merlyna Lim (Carleton University), Saskia Schäfer (Columbia University), and Wahyuddin Halim (State Islamic University Makassar).

the Internet intersect with the Islamic concept of *riya*, roughly translated as "showing off". Yet, social media and other online platforms, such as forums or blogs, offer ample space for users to discuss and eventually find agreement upon such activities. This is only one example of how 'new' media prompt the renegotiation of traditional practices, forms of communication, and self-representation (Gershon, 2010).

The infusion of digital media in everyday expressions of Islamic piety affect not only the construction of Islamic authority but also popular understandings of Islamic gender roles. Selfies, popular among social media users across Southeast Asia, expose those behind the camera to exhibitionist narratives and other forms of criticism framed in the discourse of Muslim femininity and virtue. Notably, both the authors of contested visual expressions and their most vigorous critics are predominantly young social media users. As a number of presenters argued, social media use affects the ways in which Southeast Asian Muslims understand their religion and conversely, Muslims' understandings of their religion affect the ways they use social media to spread their message, as in the case of online *da'wa*, or Islamic proselytization.

Another aspect of social and digital media, which is rarely touched upon, is the effect of sound or music both upon consumers and music production industries. For example, *nasyid* – a popular music genre among Southeast Asian Muslims today – reconciles piety with modern consumerist lifestyles by offering new avenues for the expression and experience of Islam. Islamic sounds, constitutive of short videos posted on social media and other online platforms, trigger affective registers among users and generate sentiments and dispositions which further inform online and offline socialities. Social media offer sites where one can literally pour out one's heart. This stands in stark opposition to widespread anxieties that the digital could take the intimacy out of social relationships (Baym, 2010). On the contrary, social media are often used to sustain close (group) relationships beyond the limitations of physical co-presence.

Apart from sentiments that nurture group cohesion, social media can become the site where anxieties with regard to social, political, and economic disparities become projected. Such anxieties become tangible in the online (as well as offline) debates over debt and in the Malaysian state's efforts to reformulate Islamic finance around ideas of equity and equal sharing. Similarly, in Indonesia, social thresholds become imprinted in online sectarian narratives, often reinforced by violent rhetorics. As it became clear during the workshop, social and political activism in Southeast Asia today runs across the boundaries of online and offline presence and along emerging socialities. Social media can function not only to support cross-sectarian social bonds but also to demonstrate and nurture suspicion between different religious fractions. In the face of the plurality of lifestyles and voices visible in social media today, presenters also discussed various endeavors of state and non-state actors to control the online activities of Internet users as well as the implications of such attempts for processes of democratization.

The rather close and familiar setting of the workshop provided ample room for the discussion of ongoing research and the theorizing of preliminary findings. Many participants, including myself, profited from the presentations of research tackling related questions and addressing similar challenges in the study of Islamic practices and socialities in the context of social media and new technologies. The workshop

simultaneously provided opportunities for rigorous exchange for both presenters and external participants. The topic of the workshop received a wide coverage by Austrian media, which signals rising public interest in Islamic practices in the digital age. Additional information on the workshop is provided on the Austrian Academy of Sciences website reporting on local events.[2] With its particular constellation and well-chosen venue, the workshop was certainly perceived as an exceptional scholarly event.

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2 Austrian Academy of Sciences' events, retrieved from http://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/events-communication/events/eventdetail/article/social-media-religioese-praxis-in-indonesien/

Book Review: Lwin, S. M. (2010). Narrative Structures in Burmese Folk Tales.

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▸ Bódis, Z. (2016). Book review: Lwin, S. M. (2010). Narrative structures in Burmese folk tales. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *9*(2), 315-318.

In order to properly evaluate Soe Marlar Lwin's book that is excellently structured, rich in references, and provides a well-chosen text selection, we need to give a short overview of the historical 'currents' in folktale research. European culture has been a 'cradle' for folktale research and by the 20th century a new interpretive approach, breaking away from this historicity, has been formed providing a universal interpretive framework independent of the European roots.[1]

Taking a closer look at the historical changes considering the history of European tale research, we should distinguish between three different periods, all of which approach tales with a specific point of view. Therefore, each of them is associated with different aspects of folktales and the phenomena in tales. In the *premodern period* concepts, thought schemes originating from European Romanticism defined the essence of tales. For researches of the period, the most important task of folk culture when following the Herderian organic historical approach was considered to be the formation of identities of linguistic-cultural communities through the concept of nation based on folk culture, folk poetry, and especially folktales. Therefore, in accordance with their most significant aim, collecting and canonizing folktales resulted in the establishment of a set of texts (according to the latest research we should rather speak about the creation of these texts) – previously folktales were not regarded as part of high culture – by which a special value was bestowed upon folktales: On the one hand, preserving the traces of the mythical past of nations, folktale functioned as an inexhaustible archive (for the disciplines of the history of language and of folklore); on the other hand, it functioned as a model for contemporary literary production and national awakening that everywhere brought with itself the process of the literary tale becoming a special, priority genre.

Those interpreting the *modern period* – partly due to the oral tradition seemingly being pushed to the background – were not interested in finding new tale texts; they rather turned to the interpretation of already existing (collected) texts from various aspects. The folktale text is separated from the concept of the national; attention is turned toward the universality of tales. This is how the interpretation of tales becomes the research of structures – the series of narrative elements as Proppean or archetypal reminiscences, as in the case of Jungian tale interpretations. In both cases folktale becomes interesting as a text that may carry a message for the community, remaining valid over a long period of time

1 This book review has been translated from Hungarian into English by Gabriella Agnes Nagy.

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because it either activates the basic narrative desires of man ("*Narrare necesse est!*"), or the cathartic force hidden in recognizing and making conscious of world view structures identified with the images of the collective consciousness. A pledge for all this is the well-graspable structure of the text which partly carries pseudo-initiative characteristics (*Mircea Eliade*) – a text that may be well-revealed and may be transformed into structural formulas and motivic catalogues.

Folktale research in Central-Europe took the first steps toward the interpretation of folktales in the *postmodern period* when tales were no longer interpreted as being a historical archive or a network of narrative structure but a kind of socio-cultural phenomenon in which text production and reception governed by interpretative tendencies gave a new color to folktale research. Between the 1940s and 1970s Central-European folktale research has stepped out of the closed world of texts collected in the 19th century; researchers again began to venture out to field work and recorded the last traces of the living traditional European folktale telling tradition. According to the theory of the individuality (or Budapest) school coined by Gyula Ortutay – which became famous and respected internationally due to Linda Dégh's work – folktale is not simply a structure but it carries with itself traces of the storyteller's world view and experiences. This approach is elaborated in Jack Zipes meme-theory. According to his theory, folktales carry a specific consciousness content (they are called memes by evolutionary biology): These are cultural, intelligent "means" by which individuals and communities form the order of human existence and convey "instructions" for existing in the world. This interpretative path was lately expanded by the Hungarian phenomenological-hermeneutic school coined by Péter Bálint – a school researching the folktale tradition of the Carpathian Basin – according to which tale is a performative phenomenon created together by both the storyteller and his community/audience.

When, after this short overview, we open Soe Marlar Lwin's book we may definitely see that the author took an unavoidable step in researching the Burmese folktale tradition. After the work of previous researchers, such as Maung Htin Aung (the first publisher of Burmese tales in English), and the first in-depth overview by Abbott and Khin, Lwin undertook the task of continuing her predecessors' work navigating from the premodern folktale research period, based on the most extensive overview of reference materials, to the directions offered by postmodern folktale research.

The seven chapters of the book constitute a logically structured, well-arranged text that follows a clear cut argument: Beginning from the structuralist theories she establishes her thesis by analyzing specific folktale texts. The central idea is to examine the previously ignored narratological questions of "how the fundamental events interlock with one another to create a plot and how formal patterns are related to the story's content" (p. 125).

Having briefly defined the genre of folktale in the first chapter, in the next two chapters the author continues by clarifying narratological concepts, providing the basis of her analysis and the elaboration of the methodology she wishes to use. The introductory chapter on narratological concepts proves a thorough knowledge of reference literature on the subject. She avoids the mistake that Central-European folktale research schools – partly due to the ideological constraint of the previous

communist period – began to overcome only recently. They no longer consider the Proppean type of narrative analysis as the master key of tale interpretation but as a possible *starting point* for interpretation. In Lwin's overview, the reformed structure analysis based on later narratological concerns reflecting on the Proppean narrative analysis – for instance Dundes, Toolan, Bal, Ochs/Capps – seems to be much more applicable for describing different text types. In her analysis she "classified the functional events into various models" (p. 37). Lwin consciously chooses the seemingly most significant segment for the narratological dictionary of concepts: "Among all the different aspects, the present study chooses the aspect of story structure. It aims to identify the functional events forming the storylines in some Burmese folk tales and their relation in various models of the basic story structure" (p. 20). In further parts of her book, after identifying the functional events, it becomes visible where the researcher's path would lead to after clarifying the key concepts:

> While examining how the events are linked into familiar trajectories, the study will also take note of any deviation from them and will explore what effect such deviation has on the storyline of a tale. With this, the . . . study will argue that, instead of looking for a single pattern in plots that may be different across different types of tales, an analysis of narrative structures should investigate various possible temporal and/or causal linkage with which events are bound together into well-organized storylines. (p. 22)

Perhaps this is the greatest achievement of Lwin's work since she opens up possibilities of structural-narratological analysis by expanding the category of the 'well-organized' storyline – those texts may also be considered 'well-organized' that previously, according to the lesser defined Proppean system, were listed in the periphery of texts as having no value, being incorrect, and uncategorizable.[2] Since in the case of those tales, where the order of functions regarded as constant is modified, Propp seems to reveal only 'oscillations', incidental digressions or deviations from the perfect narrative structure. Contrary to Propp, in Lwin's system there is a possibility to identify functional events and to reveal the linkage in the storyline. Therefore, "according to the similarities in their structural patterns and functional events, making up the main storyline" (p. 37), Lwin lists the given folktale texts under five models under which specific folktales may be described by the help of binary oppositional pairs (reward/punishment, interdiction/violation, problem/solution).

After achieving the scientific goal set out by Lwin, the closing chapter of the book does not really end but opens up paths for further research in folktale interpretation: "The functional events, the different models, and the linkage among those events in each model discovered in this study are expected to serve as a stable 'what' for the discussion on the 'how' of storytelling in future research" (p. 128). Obviously, in this chapter Lwin's flexible approach prepares a new series of studies to be written by the author where she may interpret tales as a complex phenomenon: "[A]n oral storytel-

2 Due to similar experiences during the analysis of the Gypsy storytelling tradition of the Carpathian Basin, the previously mentioned Hungarian folktale research school has also turned away from the Proppean model and opened up possibilities for folktale reception toward the hermeneutical-phenomenological textual interpretation.

ling performance can be regarded as a synaesthetic activity with the verbal, vocal, and visual aspects occurring at the same time" (p. 130).

On the one hand, the book entitled *Narrative Structures in Burmese Folk Tales* directs the attention of international folktale research to the specificities of Burmese folktales, and on the other hand, the textual force, the clear cut and excellent use of concepts, the articulate and well-organized argument contribute to a kind of approach that ultimately enriches the reference literature of folktale research. By using the most important theoretical outcomes of modern text centered folktale research it provides the possibility for the Burmese tales, and tales in general as a complex genre, to become worthy of attention even for the postmodern approach – an approach focusing on orality, multidimensionality, and performativity.

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Call for Papers

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Philanthropic Giving and Development in Southeast Asia

The upcoming issue of the *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* (ASEAS) 10(2) features a focus on grant-making, and philanthropic trends in Southeast Asia, assessing the funding practice of both international and emerging local foundations.

While Southeast Asia's economic growth has been impressive in recent years, poverty remains widespread and socio-economic gaps persist and widen as the benefits and costs of development have not been shared equitably among the countries and people of the region. In this context, some would argue that institutional and private philanthropic giving has a role to play in fostering gradual change and addressing some of the arrangements contributing to growing gaps, or at the very least in shielding some of the most vulnerable groups. At the same time, critics argue that these funding practices are inherently linked to private values and interests, and may be irrelevant and/or create new dependencies.

Philanthropy (briefly defined as donation or investment of private capital for the public good) is transforming itself in Southeast Asia. A notable trend is the decrease of presence and funding from foundations from the United States, such as the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation with a tradition of context-specific strategic grant-making in the region, while new foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation opt for a more "global" approach and choose to operate from a distance and through intermediaries. Smaller international foundations are confronted with raising costs, with some halting their ground operations and others becoming intermediaries rather than donors in their search for additional resources. At the same time new forms of personal and institutionalized giving are emerging as a result of a growing middle-class and accumulated wealth, with many indigenous private foundations being established across the region. In addition, pressure is growing on companies and corporate actors to show a socially conscious image by funding projects and contributing to sustainable development (Corporate Social Responsibility - CSR). At times, such forms of aid and contributions are faith-based and embedded in religious modes, such as an alternative use of *zakad* (alms) among Muslims in Indonesia or in cultural values like for the Chinese family foundations in Singapore. We welcome submissions that critically discuss one or more of the following aspects:

- Current trends in philanthropy in Southeast Asia; Socio-
- legal and cultural frameworks enabling or disabling philanthropic giving in Southeast Asia;
- The role and practices of international private philanthropic foundations in Southeast Asia in the context of development efforts;
- Indigenous foundations and other forms of home-grown philanthropic giving;
- Different causes and types of private grant-making (for peace, gender funds, etc.) and their impacts;
- The growing importance of intermediary and sub-granting organizations;
- Corporate grant-making, corporate social responsibility, and corporate social accountability;
- Crowd-funding and other electronic platforms to raise and give funding;
- Private grant-making, accountability, and power in Southeast Asia.

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Abstract to the Guest Editor ***30 October 2016*** - Manuscript to the Guest Editor ***30 November 2016*** - Submission Deadline (ASEAS) ***30 January 2017***. If you intend to submit a paper, please contact alexander.trupp@seas.at - For submissions out of focus, please contact aseas@seas.at - Please submit your paper online at http://aseas.univie.ac.at. You can find more information on our submission guidelines at http://www.seas.at/our-journal-aseas/submission-guidelines/.

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